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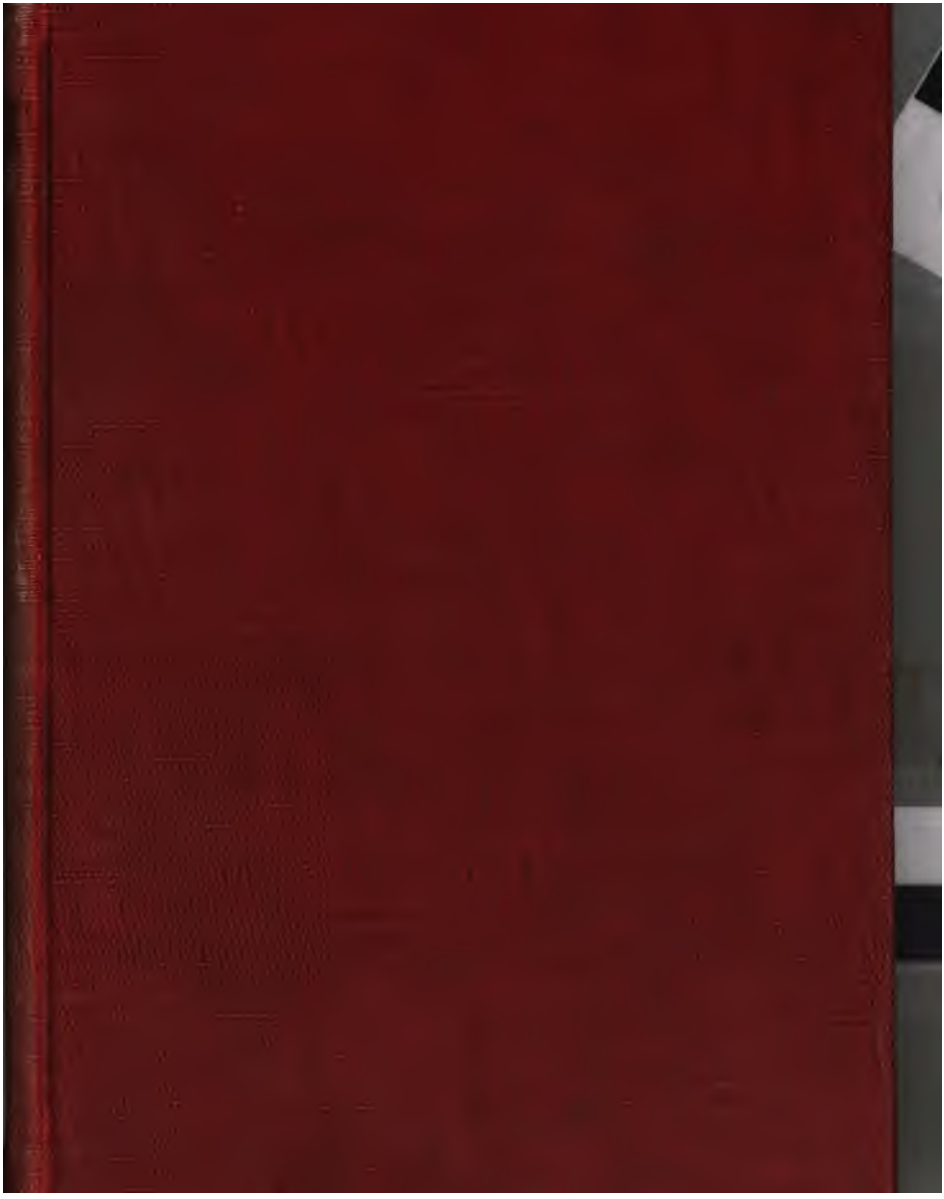

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VOL. CLXII.

THE LANCASHIRE WITCHES

BY

WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH, ESQ.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

THE

LANCASHIRE WITCHES.

A ROMANCE

OF

PENDLE FOREST.

BY

WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH, ESQ.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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BERNH. TAUCHNITZ JUN.

1849.

Sir Jeffery. — Is there a justice in Lancashire has so much skill in witches as I have? Nay, I 'll speak a proud word, you shall turn me loose against any Witch-finder in Europe. I 'd make an ass of Hopkins if he were alive. SHADWELL.

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THE LANCASHIRE WITCHES.

INTRODUCTION.

THE LAST ABBOT OF WHALLEY.

THE LANCASHIRE WITCHES.

CHAPTER I.

The beacon on Pendle Hill.

THERE were eight watchers by the beacon on Pendle Hill in Lancashire. Two were stationed on either side of the north-eastern extremity of the mountain. One looked over the castled heights of Clithero; the woody eminences of Bowland; the bleak ridges of Thornley; the broad moors of Bleasdale; the Trough of Bolland, and Wolf Crag; and even brought within his ken the black fells overhanging Lancaster. The other tracked the stream called Pendle Water, almost from its source amid the neighbouring hills, and followed its windings through the leafless forest until it united its waters to those of the Calder, and swept on in swifter and clearer current to wash the base of Whalley Abbey. But the watcher's survey did not stop here. Noting the sharp spire of Burnley Church, relieved against the rounded masses of timber constituting Townley Park; as well as the entrance of the gloomy mountain gorge, known as the Grange of Cliviger; his far-reaching gaze passed over Todmorden, and settled upon the distant summits of Blackstone Edge.

Dreary was the prospect on all sides. Black moor, bleak fell, straggling forest, intersected with sullen streams as black as ink, with here and there a small tarn, or moss-pool, with waters of the same hue — these constituted the chief features

of the scene. The whole district was barren, and thinly-populated. Of towns only Clitheroe, Colne, and Burnley — the latter little more than a village — were in view. In the valleys there were a few hamlets and scattered cottages, and on the uplands an occasional "booth," as the hut of the herdsman was termed; but of more important mansions, there were only six, as Merlay, Twistleton, Alcancoats, Saxfeld, Ightenhill, and Gawthorpe. The "vaccaries" for the cattle, of which the herdsmen had the care, and the "lawnds," or parks within the forest, appertaining to some of the halls before mentioned, offered the only evidences of cultivation. All else was heathy waste, morass, and wood.

Still, in the eye of the sportsman — and the Lancashire gentlemen of the sixteenth century were keen lovers of sport— the country had a strong interest. Pendle forest abounded with game. Grouse, plover, and bittern were found upon its moors; woodcock and snipe on its marshes; mallard, teal, and widgeon upon its pools. In its chaces ranged herds of deer, protected by the terrible forest-laws, then in full force; and the hardier huntsman might follow the wolf to his lair in the mountains; might spear the boar in the oaken glades, or the otter on the river's brink; might unearth the badger or the fox, or smite the fierce cat-a-mountain with a quarrel from his bow. A nobler victim sometimes, also, awaited him in the shape of a wild mountain bull, a denizen of the forest, and a remnant of the herds that had once browsed upon the hills, but which had almost all been captured, and removed to stock the park of the Abbot of Whalley. The streams and pools were full of fish; the stately heron frequented the meres; and on the craggy heights built the kite, the falcon, and the kingly eagle.

There were eight watchers by the beacon. Two stood apart from the others, looking to the right and the left of the hill. Both were armed with swords and arquebuses, and wore

steel caps and coats of buff. Their sleeves were embroidered with the five wounds of Christ, encircling the name of Jesus—the badge of the Pilgrimage of Grace. Between them, on the verge of the mountain, was planted a great banner, displaying a silver cross, the chalice, and the Host, together with an ecclesiastical figure, but wearing a helmet instead of a mitre, and holding a sword in place of a crosier, with the unoccupied hand pointing to the two towers of a monastic structure, as if to intimate that he was armed for its defence. This figure, as the device beneath it showed, represented John Paslew, Abbot of Whalley, or, as he styled himself in his military capacity, Earl of Poverty.

There were eight watchers by the beacon. Two have been described. Of the other six, two were stout herdsmen carrying crooks, and holding a couple of mules, and a richly-caparisoned war-horse by the bridle. Near them stood a broad-shouldered, athletic young man, with the fresh complexion, curling brown hair, light eyes, and open Saxon countenance best seen in his native county of Lancaster. He wore a Lincoln-green tunic, with a bugle suspended from the shoulder by a silken cord, and a silver plate engraved with the three luces, the ensign of the Abbot of Whalley, hung by a chain from his neck. A hunting-knife was in his girdle, and an eagle's plume in his cap, and he leaned upon the butt-end of a cross-bow, regarding three persons who stood together by a peat fire, on the sheltered side of the beacon. Two of these were elderly men, in the white gowns and scapularies of Cistertian monks, doubtless from Whalley, as the abbey belonged to that order. The third and last, and evidently their superior, was a tall man in a riding dress, wrapped in a long mantle of black velvet, trimmed with minever, and displaying the same badges as those upon the sleeves of the sentinels, only wrought in richer material. His features were strongly marked and stern, and bore traces

of age; but his eye was bright, and his carriage erect and dignified.

The beacon, near which the watchers stood, consisted of a vast pile of logs of timber, heaped upon a circular range of stones, with openings to admit air, and having the centre filled with fagots, and other quickly combustible materials. Torches were placed near at hand, so that the pile could be lighted on the instant.

The watch was held one afternoon at the latter end of November, 1536. In that year had arisen a formidable rebellion in the northern counties of England, the members of which, while engaging to respect the person of the king, Henry VIII., and his issue, bound themselves by solemn oath to accomplish the restoration of Papal supremacy throughout the realm, and the restitution of religious establishments and lands to their late ejected possessors. They bound themselves, also, to punish the enemies of the Romish Church, and suppress heresy. From its religious character the insurrection assumed the name of the Pilgrimage of Grace, and numbered among its adherents all who had not embraced the new doctrines in Yorkshire and Lancashire. That such an outbreak should occur on the suppression of the monasteries was not marvellous. The desecration and spoliation of so many sacred structures — the destruction of shrines and images long regarded with veneration — the ejection of so many ecclesiastics, renowned for hospitality and revered for piety and learning — the violence and rapacity of the commissioners appointed by the Vicar-General Cromwell to carry out these severe measures — all these outrages were regarded by the people with abhorrence, and disposed them to aid the sufferers in resistance. As yet the wealthier monasteries in the north had been spared, and it was to preserve them from the greedy hands of the visitors, Doctors Lee and Layton, that the insurrection had been

undertaken. A simultaneous rising took place in Lincolnshire, headed by Makarel, Abbot of Barlings, but it was speedily quelled by the vigour and skill of the Duke of Suffolk, and its leader executed. But the northern outbreak was better organised, and of greater force, for it now numbered thirty thousand men, under the command of a skilful and resolute leader named Robert Aske.

As may be supposed, the priesthood were main movers in a revolt having their especial benefit for its aim; and many of them, following the example of the Abbot of Barlings, clothed themselves in steel instead of woollen garments, and girded on the sword and the breast-plate for the redress of their grievances and the maintenance of their rights. Amongst these were the Abbots of Jervaux, Furness, Fountains, Rivaulx, and Salley, and, lastly, the Abbot of Whalley, before mentioned; a fiery and energetic prelate, who had ever been constant and determined in his opposition to the aggressive measures of the king. Such was the Pilgrimage of Grace, such its design, and such its supporters.

Several large towns had already fallen into the hands of the insurgents. York, Hull, and Pontefract had yielded; Skipton Castle was besieged, and defended by the Earl of Cumberland; and battle was offered to the Duke of Norfolk and the Earl of Shrewsbury, who headed the king's forces at Doncaster. But the object of the Royalist leaders was to temporise, and an armistice was offered to the rebels and accepted. Terms were next proposed and debated.

During the continuance of this armistice all hostilities ceased; but beacons were reared upon the mountains, and their fires were to be taken as a new summons to arms. This signal the eight watchers expected.

Though late in November, the day had been unusually fine, and, in consequence, the whole hilly ranges around were

clearly discernible, but now the shades of evening were fast drawing on.

"Night is approaching," cried the tall man in the velvet mantle, impatiently; "and still the signal comes not. Wherefore this delay? Can Norfolk have accepted our conditions? Impossible. The last messenger from our camp at Scawsby Lees brought word that the duke's sole terms would be the king's pardon to the whole insurgent army, provided they at once dispersed — except ten persons, six named and four unnamed."

"And were you amongst those named, lord abbot?" demanded one of the monks.

"John Paslew, Abbot of Whalley, it was said, headed the list," replied the other, with a bitter smile. "Next came William Trafford, Abbot of Salley. Next Adam Sudbury, Abbot of Jervaux. Then our leader, Robert Aske. Then John Eastgate, Monk of Whalley —"

"How, lord abbot!" exclaimed the monk. "Was my name mentioned?"

"It was," rejoined the abbot. "And that of William Haydocke, also Monk of Whalley, closed the list."

"The unrelenting tyrant," muttered the other monk. "But these terms could not be accepted?"

"Assuredly not," replied Paslew, "they were rejected with scorn. But the negotiations were continued by Sir Ralph Ellerker and Sir Robert Bowas, who were to claim on our part a free pardon for all; the establishment of a Parliament and courts of justice at York; the restoration of the Princess Mary to the succession; the Pope to his jurisdiction; and our brethren to their houses. But such conditions will never be granted. With my consent no armistice should have been agreed to. We are sure to lose by the delay. But I was overruled by the Archbishop of York and the Lord Darcy. Their

voices prevailed against the Abbot of Whalley — or, if it please you, the Earl of Poverty."

"It is the assumption of that derisive title which has drawn upon you the full force of the king's resentment, lord abbot," observed Father Eastgate.

"It may be," replied the abbot. "I took it in mockery of Cromwell and the ecclesiastical commissioners, and I rejoice that they have felt the sting. The Abbot of Barlings called himself Captain Cobler because, as he affirmed, the state wanted mending like old shoon. And is not my title equally well chosen? Is not the church smitten with poverty? Have not ten thousand of our brethren been driven from their homes to beg or to starve? Have not the houseless poor whom we fed at our gates, and lodged within our wards, gone away hungry and without rest? Have not the sick whom we would have relieved died untended by the hedge-side? I am the head of the poor in Lancashire, the redresser of their grievances, and therefore I style myself Earl of Poverty. Have I not done well?"

"You have, lord abbot," replied Father Eastgate.

"Poverty will not alone be the fate of the Church, but of the whole realm if the rapacious designs of the monarch and his heretical counsellors are carried forth," pursued the abbot. "Cromwell, Audeley, and Rich have wisely ordained that no infant shall be baptised without tribute to the king; that no man who owns not above twenty pounds a year shall consume wheaten bread, or eat the flesh of fowl or swine without tribute; and that all ploughed land shall pay tribute likewise. Thus the Church is to be beggared, the poor plundered, and all men burthened, to fatten the king, and fill his exchequer."

"This must be a jest," observed Father Haydocke.

"It is a jest no man laughs at," rejoined the abbot, sternly; "any more than the king's counsellors will laugh at the Earl of

Poverty, whose title they themselves have created. But wherefore comes not the signal? Can aught have gone wrong? I will not think it. The whole country, from the Tweed to the Humber, and from the Lune to the Mersey, is ours; and if we but hold together, our cause must prevail."

"Yet we have many and powerful enemies," observed Father Eastgate; "and the king, it is said, hath sworn never to make terms with us. Tidings were brought to the abbey this morning that the Earl of Derby is assembling forces at Preston, to march upon us."

"We will give him a warm reception if he comes," replied Paslew, fiercely. "He will find that our walls have not been kernelled and embattled by license of good King Edward the Third for nothing; and that our brethren can fight as well as their predecessors fought in the time of Abbot Holden, when they took tithe by force from Sir Christopher Parsons of Slaydburn. The abbey is strong, and right well defended, and we need not fear a surprise. But it grows dark fast, and yet no signal comes."

"Perchance the waters of the Don have again arisen, so as to prevent the army from fording the stream," observed Father Haydocké; "or it may be that some disaster hath befallen our leader."

"Nay, I will not believe the latter," said the abbot; "Robert Aske is chosen by Heaven to be our deliverer. It has been prophesied that a 'worm with one eye' shall work the redemption of the fallen faith, and you know that Robert Aske hath been deprived of his left orb by an arrow."

"Therefore it is," observed Father Eastgate, "that the Pilgrims of Grace chant the following ditty: —

"Forth shall come an Aske with one eye,
He shall be chief of the company —
Chief of the northern chivalry."

"What more?" demanded the abbot, seeing that the monk appeared to hesitate.

"Nay, I know not whether the rest of the rhymes may please you, lord abbot," replied Father Eastgate.

"Let me hear them and I will judge," said Paslew.

Thus urged, the monk went on: —

> "One shall sit at a solemn feast,
> Half warrior, half priest.
> The greatest there shall be the least."

"The last verse," observed the monk, "has been added to the ditty by Nicholas Demdike. I heard him sing it the other day at the abbey gate."

"What, Nicholas Demdike of Worston?" cried the abbot; "he whose wife is a witch?"

"The same," replied Eastgate.

"Hoo be so ceawnted, sure eno," remarked the forester, who had been listening attentively to their discourse, and who now stepped forward; "boh dunna yo think it. Beleemy, lort abbut, Bess Demdike 's too yunk an too protty for a witch."

"Thou art bewitched by her thyself, Cuthbert," said the abbot, angrily. "I shall impose a penance upon thee to free thee from the evil influence. Thou must recite twenty paternosters daily, fasting, for one month; and afterwards perform a pilgrimage to the shrine of our Lady of Gilsland. Bess Demdike is an approved and notorious witch, and hath been seen by credible witnesses attending a devil's sabbath on this very hill — Heaven shield us! It is therefore that I have placed her and her husband under the ban of the church; pronounced sentence of excommunication against them; and commanded all my clergy to refuse baptism to their infant daughter, newly born."

"Wea 's me! ey knoas 't reet weel, lort abbut," replied Ashbead, "and Bess taks t' sentence sore ta 'ert!"

"Then let her amend her ways or heavier punishment will befal her," cried Paslew, severely. "'*Sortilegam non patieris vivere*,' saith the Levitical law. If she be convicted she shall die the death. That she is comely I admit, but it is the comeliness of a child of sin. Dost thou know the man with whom she is wedded — or supposed to be wedded — for I have seen no proof of the marriage? He is a stranger here."

"Ey knoas neawt abowt him, lort abbut, 'cept that he cum to Pendle a twalmont agoa," replied Ashbead; "boh ey knoas fu' weel that t'eawtcumbling felly robt me ot prottiest lass i' aw Lonkyshiar — aigh, or i' aw Englondshiar, fo' t' matter o' that."

"What manner of man is he?" inquired the abbot.

"Oh, he 's a feaw teyke — a varra feaw teyke," replied Ashbead; "wi' a feace as black as a boggart, sooty shoiny hewr loike a mowdywarp, an' een loike a stanniel. Boh for running, rostling, an throwing t' stoan he'n no match i' this keawntry. Ey'n triet him at aw three gams, so ey con speak. For't most part he'n a big, black bandyhewit wi' him, and, by th' Mess, ey canna help thinkin he meys free sumtoimes wi' yor lortship's bucks."

"Ha! this must be looked to," cried the abbot. "You say you know not whence he comes? 'T is strange."

"T' missmannert carl 'll boide naw questionin', odd rottle him!" replied Ashbead. "He awnsurs wi' a gibe, or a thwack o' his staff. Whon ey last seet him, he threatened t' raddle me booans weel, boh ey sooan lowert him a peg."

"We will find a way of making him speak," said the abbot.

"He can speak, and right well if he pleases," remarked Father Eastgate; "for though ordinarily silent and sullen enough, yet when he doth talk it is not like one of the hinds

with whom he consorts, but in good set phrase; and his bearing is as bold as that of one who hath seen service in the field."

"My curiosity is aroused," said the abbot. "I must see him."

"Noa sooner said than done," cried Ashbead, "for be t' Lort Harry, ey see him stonding be yon moss poo' o' top t' hill, though how he'n getten theer t' Dule owny knoas."

And he pointed out a tall dark figure standing near a little pool on the summit of the mountain, about a hundred yards from them.

"Talk of ill, and ill cometh," observed Father Haydocke. "And see the wizard hath a black hound with him. It may be his wife, in that likeness."

"Naw, ey knoas t' hount reet weel, Feyther Haydocke," replied the forester; "it 's a Saint Hubert, an' a rareun fo' fox or badgert. Odds loife, feyther, whoy that 's t' black bandyhewit I war speaking on."

"I like not the appearance of the knave at this juncture," said the abbot, "yet I wish to confront him, and charge him with his misdemeanours."

"Hark, he sings," cried Father Haydocke. And as he spoke a voice was heard chanting, —

> "One shall sit at a solemn feast,
> Half warrior, half priest,
> The greatest there shall be the least."

"The very ditty I heard," cried Father Eastgate, "but list, he has more of it." And the voice resumed, —

> "He shall be rich, yet poor as me,
> Abbot, and Earl of Poverty.
> Monk and soldier, rich and poor,
> He shall be hang'd at his own door."

Loud derisive laughter followed the song.

"By our Lady of Whalley, the knave is mocking us," cried the abbot; "send a bolt to silence him, Cuthbert."

The forester instantly bent his bow, and a quarrel whistled off in the direction of the singer, but whether his aim were not truly taken, or he meant not to hit the mark, it is certain that Demdike remained untouched. The reputed wizard laughed aloud, took off his felt cap in acknowledgment, and marched deliberately down the side of the hill.

"Thou art not wont to miss thy aim, Cuthbert," cried the abbot, with a look of displeasure. "Take good heed thou producest this scurril knave before me, when these troublous times are over. But what is this? — he stops — ha! he is practising his devilries on the mountain's side."

It would seem that the abbot had good warrant for what he said, as Demdike having paused at a broad green patch on the hill side, was now busied in tracing a circle round it with his staff. He then spoke aloud some words, which the superstitious beholders construed into an incantation, and after tracing the circle once again, and casting some tufts of dry heather, which he plucked from an adjoining hillock, on three particular spots, he ran quickly downwards, followed by his hound, and leaping a stone wall, surrounding a little orchard, at the foot of the hill, disappeared from view.

"Go and see what he hath done," cried the abbot to the forester, "for I like it not."

Ashbead instantly obeyed, and on reaching the green spot in question, shouted out that he could discern nothing, but presently added, as he moved about, that the turf heaved like a sway-bed beneath his feet, and he thought — to use his own phraseology — would "brast." The abbot then commanded him to go down to the orchard below, and if he could find Demdike to bring him to him instantly. The forester did

as he was bidden, ran down the hill, and, leaping the orchard-wall as the other had done, was lost to sight.

Ere long, it became quite dark, and as Ashbead did not re-appear, the abbot gave vent to his impatience and uneasiness, and was proposing to send one of the herdsmen in search of him, when his attention was suddenly diverted by a loud shout from one of the sentinels, and a fire was seen on a distant hill on the right.

"The signal! the signal!" cried Paslew, joyfully. "Kindle a torch! — quick, quick!"

And as he spoke, he seized a brand and plunged it into the peat fire, while his example was followed by the two monks.

"It is the beacon on Blackstone Edge," cried the abbot; "and look! a second blazes over the Grange of Cliviger — another on Ightenhill — another on Boulsworth Hill — and the last on the neighbouring heights of Padiham. Our own comes next. May it light the enemies of our holy Church to perdition!"

With this, he applied the burning brand to the combustible matter of the beacon. The monks did the same; and in an instant a tall, pointed flame, rose up from a thick cloud of smoke. Ere another minute had elapsed, similar fires shot up to the right and the left, on the high lands of Trawden Forest, on the jagged points of Foulridge, on the summit of Cowling Hill, and so on to Skipton. Other fires again blazed on the towers of Clithero, on Longridge and Ribchester, on the woody eminences of Bowland, on Wolf Crag, and on fell and scar all the way to Lancaster. It seemed the work of enchantment, so suddenly and so strangely did the fires shoot forth. As the beacon flame increased, it lighted up the whole of the extensive table-land on the summit of Pendle Hill; and a long, lurid streak, fell on the darkling moss-pool near which the

wizard had stood. But when it attained its utmost height, it revealed the depths of the forest below, and a red reflexion, here and there, marked the course of Pendle Water. The excitement of the abbot and his companions momently increased, and the sentinels shouted as each new beacon was lighted. At last, almost every hill had its watch-fire, and so extraordinary was the spectacle, that it seemed as if weird beings were abroad, and holding their revels on the heights.

Then it was, that the abbot, mounting his steed, called out to the monks — "Holy fathers, you will follow to the abbey as you may. I shall ride fleetly on, and despatch two hundred archers to Huddersfield and Wakefield. The abbots of Salley and Jervaux, with the Prior of Burlington, will be with me at midnight, and at daybreak we shall march our forces to join the main army. Heaven be with you!"

"Stay!" cried a harsh, imperious voice. "Stay!"

And, to his surprise, the abbot beheld Nicholas Demdike standing before him. The aspect of the wizard was dark and forbidding, and seen by the beacon light, his savage features, blazing eyes, tall gaunt frame, and fantastic garb, made him look like something unearthly. Flinging his staff over his shoulder, he slowly approached, with his black hound following close by at his heels.

"I have a caution to give you, lord abbot," he said; "hear me speak before you set out for the abbey, or ill will befal you."

"Ill *will* befal me if I listen to thee, thou wicked churl," cried the abbot. "What hast thou done with Cuthbert Ashbead?"

"I have seen nothing of him since he sent a bolt after me at your bidding, lord abbot," replied Demdike.

"Beware lest any harm come to him, or thou wilt rue it," cried Paslew. "But I have no time to waste on thee. Fare-

well, fathers. High mass will be said in the convent church before we set out on the expedition to-morrow morning. You will both attend it."

"You will never set out upon the expedition, lord abbot," cried Demdike, planting his staff so suddenly into the ground before the horse's head that the animal reared and nearly threw his rider.

"How now, fellow, what mean you?" cried the abbot, furiously.

"To warn you," replied Demdike.

"Stand aside," cried the abbot, spurring his steed, "or I will trample you beneath my horse's feet."

"I might let you ride to your own doom," rejoined Demdike, with a scornful laugh, as he seized the abbot's bridle. "But you shall hear me. I tell you, you will never go forth on this expedition. I tell you that, ere to-morrow, Whalley Abbey will have passed for ever from your possession; and that if you go thither again, your life will be forfeited. Now will you listen to me?"

"I am wrong in doing so," cried the abbot, who could not, however, repress some feelings of misgiving at this alarming address. "Speak, what would you say?"

"Come out of ear-shot of the others, and I will tell you," replied Demdike. And he led the abbot's horse to some distance further on the hill.

"Your cause will fail, lord abbot," he then said. "Nay, it is lost already."

"Lost!" cried the abbot, out of all patience. "Lost! Look around. Twenty fires are in sight — ay, thirty, and every fire thou seest will summon a hundred men at the least, to arms. Before an hour five hundred men will be gathered before the gates of Whalley Abbey."

"True," replied Demdike; "but they will not own the Earl of Poverty for their leader."

"What leader will they own, then?" demanded the abbot, scornfully.

"The Earl of Derby," replied Demdike. "He is on his way thither with Lord Mounteagle from Preston."

"Ha!" exclaimed Paslew, "let me go meet them, then. But thou triflest with me, fellow. Thou canst know nothing of this. Whence got'st thou thine information?"

"Heed it not," replied the other, "thou wilt find it correct. I tell thee, proud abbot, that this grand scheme of thine and of thy fellows for the restitution of the Catholic Church has failed — utterly failed."

"I tell thee thou liest, false knave," cried the abbot, striking him on the hand with his scourge. "Quit thy hold, and let me go."

"Not till I have done," replied Demdike, maintaining his grasp. "Well hast thou styled thyself Earl of Poverty, for thou art poor and miserable enough. Abbot of Whalley thou art no longer. Thy possessions will be taken from thee, and if thou returnest thy life also will be taken. If thou fleest, a price will be set upon thy head. I alone can save thee, and I will do so on one condition."

"Condition! make conditions with thee, bond-slave of Satan," cried the abbot, gnashing his teeth. "I reproach myself that I have listened to thee so long. Stand aside, or I will strike thee dead."

"You are wholly in my power," cried Demdike, with a disdainful laugh. And as he spoke he pressed the large sharp bit against the charger's mouth, and backed him quickly to the very edge of the hill, the sides of which here sloped precipitously down. The abbot would have uttered a cry, but surprise and terror kept him silent.

"Were it my desire to injure you, I could cast you down the mountain-side to certain death," pursued Demdike. "But I have no such wish. On the contrary, I will serve you, as I have said, on one condition."

"Thy condition would jemperil my soul," said the abbot, full of wrath and alarm. "Thou seekest in vain to terrify me into compliance. *Vade retro Sathanas.* I defy thee and all thy works."

Demdike laughed scornfully.

"The thunders of the Church do not frighten me," he cried. "But, look," he added, "you doubted my word when I told you the rising was at an end. The beacon-fires on Boulsworth Hill and on the Grange of Cliviger are extinguished; that on Padiham Heights is expiring — nay, it is out; and ere many minutes all these mountain watch-fires will have disappeared like lamps at the close of a feast."

"By our Lady, it is so," cried the abbot, in increasing terror. "What new jugglery is this?"

"It is no jugglery, I tell you," replied the other. "The waters of the Don have again arisen; the insurgents have accepted the king's pardon, have deserted their leaders, and dispersed. There will be no rising to-night or on the morrow. The abbots of Jervaux and Salley will strive to capitulate, but in vain. The Pilgrimage of Grace is ended. The stake for which thou playedst is lost. Thirty years hast thou governed here, but thy rule is over. Seventeen abbots have there been of Whalley — the last thou! — but there shall be none more."

"It must be the Demon in person that speaks thus to me," cried the abbot, his hair bristling on his head, and a cold perspiration bursting from his pores.

"No matter who I am," replied the other; "I have said I will aid thee on one condition. It is not much. Remove thy

ban from my wife, and baptise her infant daughter, and I am content. I would not ask thee for this service, slight though it be, but the poor soul hath set her mind upon it. Wilt thou do it?"

"No," replied the abbot, shuddering; "I will not baptise a daughter of Satan. I will not sell my soul to the powers of darkness. I adjure thee to depart from me, and tempt me no longer."

"Vainly thou seekest to cast me off," rejoined Demdike. "What if I deliver thine adversaries into thine hands, and avenge thee upon them? Even now there are a party of armed men waiting at the foot of the hill to seize thee and thy brethren. Shall I show thee how to destroy them?"

"Who are they?" demanded the abbot, surprised.

"Their leaders are John Braddyll and Richard Assheton, who shall divide Whalley Abbey between them, if thou stayest them not," replied Demdike.

"Hell consume them!" cried the abbot.

"Thy speech shows consent," rejoined Demdike. "Come this way."

And, without awaiting the abbot's reply, he dragged his horse towards the butt-end of the mountain. As they went on, the two monks, who had been filled with surprise at the interview, though they did not dare to interrupt it, advanced towards their superior, and looked earnestly and inquiringly at him, but he remained silent, while to the men-at-arms and the herdsmen, who demanded whether their own beacon-fire should be extinguished as the others had been, he answered moodily in the negative.

"Where are the foes you spoke of?" he asked, with some uneasiness, as Demdike led his horse slowly and carefully down the hill side.

"You shall see, anon," replied the other.

"You are taking me to the spot where you traced the magic circle," cried Paslew, in alarm. "I know it from its unnaturally green hue. I will not go thither."

"I do not mean you should, lord abbot," replied Demdike, halting. "Remain on this firm ground. Nay, be not alarmed, you are in no danger. Now bid your men advance, and prepare their weapons."

The abbot would have demanded wherefore, but at a glance from Demdike he complied, and the two men-at-arms, and the herdsmen, arranged themselves beside him, while Fathers Eastgate and Haydocke, who had gotten upon their mules, took up a position behind.

Scarcely were they thus placed, when a loud shout was raised below, and a band of armed men, to the number of thirty or forty, leapt the stone wall, and began to scale the hill with great rapidity. They came up a deep, dry channel, apparently worn in the hill side by some former torrent, and which led directly to the spot where Demdike and the abbot stood. The beacon-fire still blazed brightly, and illuminated the whole proceeding, showing that these men, from their accoutrements, were royalist soldiers.

"Stir not, as you value your life," said the wizard to Paslew; "but observe what shall follow."

CHAPTER II.

The eruption.

Demdike went a little further down the hill, stopping when he came to the green patch. He then plunged his staff into the sod at the first point where he had cast a tuft of heather, and with such force that it sank more than three feet. The next moment he plucked it forth, as if with a great effort, and a jet of black water spouted into the air; but heedless of this,

he went to the next marked spot,' and again plunged the sharp point of the implement into the ground. Again it sank to the same depth, and, on being drawn out, a second black jet sprung forth.

Meanwhile, the hostile party continued to advance up the dry channel before-mentioned, and shouted on beholding these strange preparations, but they did not relax their speed. Once more the staff sank into the ground, and a third black fountain followed its extraction. By this time, the royalist soldiers were close at hand and the features of their two leaders, John Braddyll and Richard Assheton, could be plainly distinguished, and their voices heard.

"'T is he! 't is the rebel abbot!" vociferated Braddyll, pressing forward. "We were not misinformed. He has been watching by the beacon. The devil has delivered him into our hands."

"Ho! ho!" laughed Demdike.

"Abbot no longer — 't is the Earl of Poverty you mean," responded Assheton. "The villain shall be gibbeted on the spot where he has fired the beacon, as a warning to all traitors."

"Ha, heretics! — ha, blasphemers! — I can at least avenge myself upon you," cried Paslew, striking spurs into his charger. But ere he could execute his purpose, Demdike had sprung backward, and catching the bridle, restrained the animal by a powerful effort.

"Hold!" he cried, in a voice of thunder, "or you will share their fate."

As the words were uttered, a dull, booming, subterranean sound was heard, and instandly afterwards, with a crash like thunder, the whole of the green circle beneath slipped off, and from a yawning rent under it burst forth, with irresistible fury, a thick inky-coloured torrent, which, rising almost breast high, fell upon the devoted royalist soldires, who were

advancing right in its course. Unable to avoid the watery eruption, or to resist its fury when it came upon them, they were instantly swept from their feet, and carried down the channel.

A sight of horror was it to behold the sudden rise of that swarthy stream, whose waters, tinged by the ruddy glare of the beacon-fire, looked like waves of blood. Nor less fearful was it to hear the first wild despairing cry raised by the victims, or the quickly stifled shrieks and groans that followed, mixed with the deafening roar of the stream, and the crashing fall of the stones, which accompanied its course. Down, down went the poor wretches, now utterly overwhelmed by the torrent, now regaining their feet only to utter a scream, and then be swept off. Here a miserable struggler, whirled onward, would clutch at the banks and try to scramble forth, but the soft turf giving way beneath him, he was hurried off to eternity,

At another point where the stream encountered some trifling opposition, some two or three managed to gain a footing, but they were unable to extricate themselves. The vast quantity of boggy soil brought down by the current, and which rapidly collected here, embedded them and held them fast, so that the momently deepening water, already up to their chins, threatened speedy immersion. Others were stricken down by great masses of turf, or huge rocky fragments which, bounding from point to point with the torrent, bruised or crushed all they encountered, or lodging in some difficult place, slightly diverted the course of the torrent, and rendered it yet more dangerous.

On one of these stones, larger than the rest, which had been stopped in its course, a man contrived to creep, and with difficulty kept his post amid the raging flood. Vainly did he extend his hand to such of his fellows as were swept

shrieking past him. He could not lend them aid, while his own position was so desperately hazardous that he did not dare to quit it. To leap on either bank was impossible, and to breast the headlong stream certain death.

On goes the current, madly, furiously, as if rejoicing in the work of destruction, while the white foam of its eddies presents a fearful contrast to the prevailing blackness of the surface. Over the last declivity it leaps, hissing, foaming, crashing like an avalanche. The stone wall for a moment opposes its force, but falls the next, with a mighty splash, carrying the spray far and wide, while its own fragments roll onwards with the stream. The trees of the orchard are uprooted in an instant, and an old elm falls prostrate. The outbuildings of a cottage are invaded, and the porkers and cattle, divining their danger, squeal and bellow in affright. But they are quickly silenced. The resistless foe has broken down wall and door, and buried the poor creatures in mud and rubbish.

The stream next invades the cottage, breaks in through door and window, and filling all the lower part of the tenement, in a few minutes converts it into a heap of ruin. On goes the destroyer, tearing up more trees, levelling more houses, and filling up a small pool, till the latter bursts its banks, and with an accession to its force, pours itself into a mill-dam. Here its waters are stayed until they find a vent underneath, and the action of the stream as it rushes downwards through this exit, forms a great eddy above, in which swim some living things, cattle and sheep from the fold not yet drowned, mixed with furniture from the cottages, and amidst them the bodies of some of the unfortunate men-at-arms which have been washed hither.

But ha! another thundering crash. The dam has burst. The torrent roars and rushes on furiously as before, joins

its forces with Pendle Water, swells up the river, and devastates the country far and wide.*

The abbot and his companions beheld this work of destruction with amazement and dread. Blanched terror sat in their cheeks, and the blood was frozen in Paslew's veins, for he thought it the work of the powers of darkness, and that he was leagued with them. He tried to mutter a prayer, but his lips refused their office. He would have moved, but his limbs were stiffened and paralysed, and he could only gaze aghast at the terrible spectacle.

Amidst it all he heard a wild burst of unearthly laughter proceeding, he thought, from Demdike, and it filled him with new dread. But he could not check the sound, neither could he stop his ears, though he would fain have done so. Like him, his companions were petrified and speechless with fear.

After this had endured for some time, though still the black torrent rushed on impetuously as ever, Demdike turned to the abbot and said, —

"Your vengeance has been fully gratified. You will now baptise my child."

* A similar eruption occurred at Pendle Hill in August, 1669, and has been described by Mr. Charles Townley, in a letter cited by Dr. Whitaker in his excellent "History of Whalley." Other and more formidable eruptions had taken place previously, occasioning much damage to the country. The cause of the phenomenon is thus explained by Mr. Townley: "The colour of the water, its coming down to the place where it breaks forth between the rock and the earth, with that other particular of its bringing nothing along but stones and earth, are evident signs that it hath not its origin from the very bowels of the mountain; but that it is only rain water coloured first in the moss-pits, of which the top of the hill, being a great and considerable plain, is full, shrunk down into some receptacle fit to contain it, until at last by its weight, or some other cause, it finds a passage to the sides of the hill, and then away between the rock and swarth, until it break the latter and violently rush out."

"Never, never, accursed being!" shrieked the abbot. "Thou mayst sacrifice her at thine own impious rites. But see, there is one poor wretch yet struggling with the foaming torrent. I may save him."

"That is John Braddyll, thy worst enemy," replied Demdike. "If he lives he shall possess half Whalley Abbey. Thou hadst best also save Richard Assheton, who yet clings to the great stone below, as if he escapes he shall have the other half. Mark him, and make haste, for in five minutes both shall be gone."

"I will save them if I can, be the consequence to myself what it may," replied the abbot.

And regardless of the derisive laughter of the other, who yelled in his ears as he went, "Bess shall see thee hanged at thy own door," he dashed down the hill to the spot where a small object distinguishable above the stream showed that some one still kept his head above water, his tall stature having preserved him.

"Is it you, John Braddyll?" cried the abbot, as he rode up.

"Ay," replied the head. "Forgive me for the wrong I intended you, and deliver me from this great peril."

"I am come for that purpose," replied the abbot, dismounting, and disencumbering himself of his heavy cloak.

By this time the two herdsmen had come up, and the abbot, taking a crook from one of them, clutched hold of the fellow, and plunging fearlessly into the stream, extended it towards the drowning man, who instantly lifted up his hand to grasp it. In doing so Braddyll lost his balance, but as he did not quit his hold, he was plucked forth from the tenacious mud, by the combined efforts of the abbot and his assistant, and with some difficulty dragged ashore.

"Now for the other," cried Paslew, as he placed Braddyll in safety.

"One-half the abbey is gone from thee," shouted a voice in his ears as he rushed on.

Presently he reached the rocky fragment on which Ralph Assheton rested. The latter was in great danger from the surging torrent, and the stone on which he had taken refuge tottered at its base, and threatened to roll over.

"In Heaven's name help me, lord abbot, as thou thyself shall be holpen at thy need," shrieked Assheton.

"Be not afraid, Richard Assheton," replied Paslew. "I will deliver thee as I have delivered John Braddyll."

But the task was not of easy accomplishment. The abbot made his preparations as before; grasped the hand of the herdsman and held out the crook to Assheton; but when the latter caught it, the stream swung him round with such force that the abbot must either abandon him, or advance further into the water. Bent on Assheton's preservation, he adopted the latter expedient, and instantly lost his feet, while the herdsman, unable longer to hold him, let go the crook, and the abbot and Assheton were swept down the stream together.

Down — down they went, destruction apparently awaiting them; but the abbot, though sometimes quite under the water, and bruised by the rough stones and gravel, with which he came in contact, still retained his self-possession, and encouraged his companion to hope for succour. In this way they were borne down to the foot of the hill, the monks, the herdsmen, and the men-at-arms having given them up as lost. But they yet lived — yet floated — though greatly injured, and almost senseless, when they were cast into a pool formed by the eddying waters at the foot of the hill. Here, wholly unable to assist himself, Assheton was seized by a

black hound belonging to a tall man, who stood on the bank, and who shouted to Paslew, as he helped the animal to bring the drowning man ashore, "The other half of the abbey is gone from thee. Wilt thou baptise my child if I send my dog to save thee?"

"Never!" replied the other, sinking as he spoke.

Flashes of fire glanced in the abbot's eyes, and stunning sounds seemed to burst his ears. A few more struggles and he became senseless.

But he was not destined to die thus. What happened afterwards he knew not, but when he recovered full consciousness he found himself stretched with aching limbs and throbbing head, upon a couch in a monastic room with a richly painted and gilded ceiling, with shields at the corners emblazoned with the three luces of Whalley, and with panels hung with tapestry from the looms of Flanders, representing divers Scriptural subjects.

"Have I been dreaming?" he murmured.

"No," replied a tall man standing by his bed-side; "thou hast been saved from one death to suffer another more ignominious."

"Ha!" cried the abbot, starting up and pressing his hand to his temples; "thou here?"

"Ay, I am appointed to watch thee," replied Demdike. "Thou art a prisoner in thine own chamber at Whalley. All has befallen as I told thee. The Earl of Derby is master of the abbey; thy adherents are dispersed; and thy brethren are driven forth. Thy two partners in rebellion, the abbots of Jervaux and Salley, have been conveyed to Lancaster Castle, whither thou wilt go, as soon as thou canst be moved."

"I will surrender all — silver and gold, land and possessions, — to the king, if I may die in peace," groaned the abbot.

"It is not needed," rejoined the other. "Attainted of felony, thy lands and abbey will be forfeited to the crown, and they shall be sold, as I have told thee, to John Braddyll and Richard Assheton, who will be rulers here in thy stead."

"Would I had perished in the flood," groaned the abbot.

"Well mayst thou wish so," returned his tormentor; "but thou wert not destined to die by water. As I have said, thou shalt be hanged at thy own door, and my wife shall witness thy end."

"Who art thou? I have heard thy voice before," cried the abbot. "It is like the voice of one whom I knew years ago, and thy features are like his — though changed — greatly changed. Who art thou?"

"Thou shalt know before thou diest," replied the other, with a look of gratified vengeance. "Farewell, and reflect upon thy fate."

So saying, he strode towards the door, while the miserable abbot arose, and marching with uncertain steps to a little oratory adjoining, which he himself had built, knelt down before the altar, and strove to pray.

CHAPTER III.

Whalley Abbey.

A SAD, sad change hath come over the fair Abbey of Whalley. It knoweth its old masters no longer. For upwards of two centuries and a half hath the "Blessed Place" * grown in beauty and riches. Seventeen abbots have exercised unbounded hospitality within it, but now they are all gone, save one! — and he is attainted of felony and treason. The grave

* Locus Benedictus de Whalley.

monk walketh no more in the cloisters, nor seeketh his pallet in the dormitory. Vesper or matin-song resound not as of old within the fine conventual church. Stripped are the altars of their silver crosses, and the shrines of their votive offerings and saintly relics. Pyx and chalice, thuribule and vial, golden-headed pastoral staff, and mitre embossed with pearls, candle-stick and Christmas ship of silver; salver, basin, and ewer — all are gone — the splendid sacristy hath been despoiled.

A sad, sad change hath come over Whalley Abbey. The libraries, well stored with reverend tomes, have been pillaged, and their contents cast to the flames; and thus long laboured manuscript, the fruit of years of patient industry, with gloriously illuminated missal, are irrecoverably lost. The large infirmary no longer receiveth the sick; in the locutory sitteth no more the guest. No longer in the mighty kitchens are prepared the prodigious supply of meats destined for the support of the poor or the entertainment of the traveller. No kindly porter stands at the gate, to bid the stranger enter and partake of the munificent abbot's hospitality, but a churlish guard bids him hie away, and menaces him if he tarries with his halbert. Closed are the buttery-hatches and the pantries; and the daily dole of bread hath ceased. Closed, also, to the brethren is the refectory. The cellarer's office is ended. The strong ale which he brewed in October, is tapped in March by roystering troopers. The rich muscadel and malmsey, and the wines of Gascoigne and the Rhine are no longer quaffed by the abbot and his more honoured guests, but drunk to his destruction by his foes. The great gallery, a hundred and fifty feet in length, the pride of the abbot's lodging, and a model of architecture, is filled, not with white-robed ecclesiastics, but with an armed earl and his retainers. Neglected is the little oratory dedicated to Our Lady of

Whalley, where night and morn the abbot used to pray. All the old religious and hospitable uses of the abbey are foregone. The reverend stillness of the cloisters, scarce broken by the quiet tread of the monks, is now disturbed by armed heel and clank of sword; while in its saintly courts are heard the ribald song, the profane jest, and the angry brawl. Of the brethren, only those tenanting the cemetery are left. All else are gone, driven forth, as vagabonds, with stripes and curses, to seek refuge where they may.

A sad, sad change has come over Whalley Abbey. In the plenitude of its pride and power has it been cast down, desecrated, despoiled. Its treasures are carried off, its ornaments sold, its granaries emptied, its possessions wasted, its storehouses sacked, its cattle slaughtered and sold. But, though stripped of its wealth and splendour; though deprived of all the religious graces that, like rich incense, lent an odour to the fane, its external beauty is yet unimpaired, and its vast proportions undiminished.

A stately pile was Whalley — one of the loveliest as well as the largest in the realm. Carefully had it been preserved by its reverend rulers, and where reparations or additions were needed they were judiciously made. Thus age had lent it beauty, by mellowing its freshness and toning its hues, while no decay was perceptible. Without a struggle had it yielded to the captor, so that no part of its wide belt of walls or towers, though so strongly constructed as to have offered effectual resistance, were injured.

Never had Whalley Abbey looked more beautiful than on a bright, clear morning in March, when this sad change had been wrought, and when from a peaceful monastic establishment it had been converted into a menacing fortress. The sun-light sparkled upon its grey walls, and filled its three great quadrangular courts with light and life, piercing the

exquisite carving of its cloisters, and revealing all the intricate beauty and combinations of the arches. Stains of painted glass fell upon the floor of the magnificent conventual church and dyed with rainbow hues the marble tombs of the Lacies, the founders of the establishment, brought thither when the monastery was removed from Stanlaw in Cheshire, and upon the brass-covered grave-stones of the abbots in the presbytery. There lay Gregory de Northbury, eighth abbot of Stanlaw and first of Whalley, and William Rede, the last abbot; but there was never to lie John Paslew. The slumber of the ancient prelates was soon to be disturbed, and the sacred structure within which they had so often worshipped upreared by sacrilegious hands. But all was bright and beauteous now, and if no solemn strains were heard in the holy pile, its stillness was scarcely less reverential and awe-inspiring. The old abbey wreathed itself in all its attractions, as if to welcome back its former ruler, whereas it was only to receive him as a captive doomed to a felon's death.

But this was outward show. Within all was terrible preparation. Such was the discontented state of the country, that fearing some new revolt, the Earl of Derby had taken measures for the defence of the abbey, and along the wide-circling walls of the close were placed ordnance and men, and within the grange stores of ammunition. A strong guard was set at each of the gates, and the courts were filled with troops. The bray of the trumpet echoed within the close, where rounds were set for the archers, and martial music resounded within the area of the cloisters. Over the great north-eastern gateway, which formed the chief entrance to the abbot's lodging, floated the royal banner. Despite these warlike proceedings the fair abbey smiled beneath the sun, in all, or more than all, its pristine beauty, its green hills sloping gently

down towards it, and the clear and sparkling Calder dashing merrily over the stones at its base.

But upon the bridge, and by the river side, and within the little village many persons were assembled, conversing gravely and anxiously together, and looking out towards the hills, where other groups were gathered, as if in expectation of some afflicting event. Most of these were herdsmen and farming men, but some among them were poor monks in the white habits of the Cistertian brotherhood, but which were now stained and threadbare, while their countenances bore traces of severest privation and suffering. All the herdsmen and farmers had been retainers of the abbot. The poor monks looked wistfully at their former habitation, but replied not except by a gentle bowing of the head to the cruel scoffs and taunts with which they were greeted by the passing soldiers; but the sturdy rustics did not bear these outrages so tamely, and more than one brawl ensued, in which blood flowed, while a ruffianly arquebussier would have been drowned in the Calder but for the exertions to save him of a monk whom he had attacked.

This took place on the eleventh of March, 1537 — more than three months after the date of the watching by the beacon before recorded — and the event anticipated by the concourse without the abbey, as well as by those within its walls, was the arrival of Abbot Paslew and Fathers Eastgate and Haydocke, who were to be brought on that day from Lancaster, and executed on the following morning before the abbey, according to sentence passed upon them.

The gloomiest object in the picture remains to be described, but yet it is necessary to its completion. This was a gallows of unusual form and height, erected on the summit of a gentle hill, rising immediately in front of the abbot's lodgings, called the Holehouses, whose rounded, bosomy

beauty, it completely destroyed. This terrible apparatus of condign punishment was regarded with abhorrence by the rustics, and it required a strong guard to be kept constantly round it to preserve it from demolition.

Amongst a group of rustics collected on the road leading to the north-east gateway, was Cuthbert Ashbead, who having been deprived of his forester's office, was now habited in a frieze doublet and hose, with a short camlet cloak on his shoulder, and a fox-skin cap, embellished with the grinning jaws of the beast on his head.

"Eigh, Ruchot o' Roaph's," he observed to a bystander, "that 's a fearfo seet that gallas. Yoan been up to t' Holehouses to tey a look at it, beloike?"

"Naw, naw, ey dunna loike such seets," replied Ruchot o' Roaph's; "besoide there wor a great rabblement at t' geate, an one o' them lunjus archer chaps knockt meh o' t' nob wi' his poike, an towd me he 'd hong me wi' t' abbut, if ey didna keep owt ot wey."

"An sarve te reet too, theaw craddinly carl!" cried Ashbead, doubling his horny fists. "Odds flesh! whey didna yo ha' a tussle wi' him? Mey honts are itchen for a bowt wi' t' heretic robbers. Walladey! walladey! that we should live to see t' oly feythers driven loike hummobees owt o' t' owd neest. Whey they sayn ot King Harry hon decreet ot we 're to ha' naw more monks or friars i' aw Englondshiar. Ony think o' that. An dunna yo knoa that t' Abbuts o' Jervaux an Salley wor hongt o' Tizeday at Loncaster Castle?"

"Good lorjus bless us!" exclaimed a sturdy hind, "we'n a pretty king. Furst he chops off his woife's heaod, an then hongs aw t' priests. Whot 'll t' warlt cum to!"

"Eigh, by t' mess, whot *win* it cum to?" cried Ruchot o' Roaph's. "But we darrna oppen owr mows fo' fear o' a gog."

"Naw, beleady! boh eyst oppen moine woide enuff," cried Ashbead; "an' if a dozen o' yo chaps win join me, eyn try to set t' poor abbut free whon they brinks him here."

"Ey'd as leef boide till to-morrow," said Ruchot o' Roaph's, uneasily.

"Eigh, thou'rt a timmersome teyke, os ey towd te efore," replied Ashbead. "But whot dust theaw say, Hal o' Nabs?" he added, to the sturdy hind who had recently spoken.

"Ey'n spill t' last drop o' meh blood i' t' owd abbut's keawse," replied Hal o' Nabs. "We winna stond by, an see him hongt loike a dog. Abbut Paslew to t' reskew, lads!"

"Eigh, Abbut Paslew to t' reskew!" responded all the others, except Ruchot o' Roaph's.

"This must be prevented," muttered a voice near them. And immediately afterwards a tall man quitted the group.

"Whoa wor it spoake?" cried Hal o' Nabs. "Oh, ey seen, that he-witch, Nick Demdike."

"Nick Demdike here!" cried Ashbead, looking round in alarm. "Has he owerheert us?"

"Loike enow," replied Hal o' Nabs. "But ey didna moind him efore."

"Naw ey noather," cried Ruchot o' Roaph's, crossing himself, and spitting on the ground. "Owr Leady o' Whalley shielt us fro' t' warlock!"

"Tawkin o' Nick Demdike," cried Hal o' Nabs, "yo'd a strawnge odventer wi' him t' neet o' t' great brast o' Pendle Hill, hadna yo, Cuthbert?"

"Yeigh, t' firrups tak' him, ey hadn," replied Ashbead. "Theawst hear aw abowt it if t' will. Ey wur sent be t' abbut down t' hill to Owen o' Gab's, o' Perkin's, o' Dannel's, o' Noll's, o' Oamfrey's orchert i' Warston lone, to luk efter him.

Weel, whon ey gets ower t' stoan wa', whot dun yo think ey sees! twanty or throtty poikemen stonding behint it, an they deshes at meh os thick os leet, an efore ey con roor oot, they blintfowlt meh, an clap an iron gog i' meh mouth. Weel, I con noather speak nor see, boh ey con use meh feet, soh ey punses at 'em reet an' laft; an be meh troath, lads, yood'n a leawght t' hear how they roart, an ey should a roart too, if I couldn, whon they began to thwack me wi' their raddling pows, an ding'd meh so abowt t' heaod, that ey fell i' a swownd. Whon ey cum to, ey wur loyin o' meh back i' Rimington Moor. Every booan i' meh hoide wratcht, an meh hewr war clottert wi' gore, boh t' eebond an t' gog wur gone, soh ey gets o' meh feet, an daddles along os weel os ey con, whon aw ot wunce ey spies a leet glenting efore meh, an dawncing abowt loike an awf or a wull-o'-whisp. Thinks ey, that 's Friar Rush an' his lantern, an' he 'll lead me into a quagmire, soh ey stops a bit, to consider where ey'd getten, for ey didna knoa t' reet road exactly; boh whon ey stood still, t' leet stood still too, on then ey meyd owt that it cum fro an owd ruint tower, an whot ey'd fancied wur one lantern proved twanty, fo' whon ey reacht t' tower an peept in thro' a brok'n winda, ey beheld a seet ey'st neer forgit — apack o' witches — eigh, witches! — sittin' in a ring, wi' their broom-sticks an lanterns abowt em!"

"Good lorjus deys!" cried Hal o' Nabs. "An whot else didsta see, mon?"

"Whoy," replied Ashbead, "t'owd hags had a little figure i' t' midst on 'em, mowded i' cley, representing t' abbut o' Whalley, — ey knoad it be't moitre an crosier, — an efter each o' t' varment had stickt a pin i' its 'eart, a tall black mon stepped for'ard, an teed a cord rownd its throttle, an hongt it up."

"An' t' black mon," cried Hal o' Nabs, breathlessly, — "t' black mon wur Nick Demdike?"

"Yoan guest it," replied Ashbead, "'t wur he! Ey wur so glopp'nt, ey couldna speak, an' meh blud fruz i' meh veins, when ey heerd a fearfo voice ask Nick wheere his woife an' chilt were. 'The infant is unbaptised,' roart t' voice, 'at the next meeting it must be sacrificed. See that thou bring it.' Demdike then bowed to Summat I couldna see, an axt when t' next meeting wur to be held. 'On the night of Abbot Paslew's execution,' awnsert t' voice. On hearing this, ey could bear nah lunger, boh shouted out, 'Witches! devils! Lort deliver us fro' ye!' An' os ey spoke, ey tried t' barst thro' t' winda. In a trice, aw t' leets went out; thar wur a great rash to t dooer; a whirrin sound i' th' air loike a covey o' partriches fleeing off; and then ey heerd nowt more; for a great stoan fell o' meh scoance, an' knockt me down senseless. When I cum' to, I wur i' Nick Demdike's cottage, wi' his woife watching ower me, and th' unbapteesed chilt i' her arms."

All exclamations of wonder on the part of the rustics, and inquiries as to the issue of the adventure, were checked by the approach of a monk, who, joining the assemblage, called their attention to a priestly train slowly advancing along the road.

"It is headed," he said, "by Fathers Chatburne and Chester, late bursers of the abbey. Alack! alack! they now need the charity themselves which they once so lavishly bestowed on others."

"Waes me!" ejaculated Ashbead. "Monry a broad merk han ey getten fro 'em."

"They'n been koind to us aw," added the others.

"Next come Father Burnley, granger, and Father Haworth, cellarer," pursued the monk; "and after them Father Dinkley, sacristan, and Father Moore, porter."

"Yo remember Feyther Moore, lads," cried Ashbead.

"Yeigh, to be sure we done," replied the others, "a good mon, a reet good mon! He never sent away t' poor — naw he!"

"After Father Moore," said the monk, pleased with their warmth, "comes Father Forrest, the procurator, with Fathers Rede, Clough, and Bancroft, and the procession is closed by Father Smith, the late prior."

"Do wno' yer whirlybooans, lads, as t' oly feythers pass," cried Ashbead, "and crave their blessing."

And as the priestly train slowly approached, with heads bowed down, and looks fixed sadly upon the ground, the rustic assemblage fell upon their knees, and implored their benediction. The foremost in the procession passed on in silence, but the prior stopped, and extending his hands over the kneeling group, cried in a solemn voice,

"Heaven bless ye, my children. Ye are about to witness a sad spectacle. You will see him who has clothed you, fed you, and taught you the way to heaven, brought hither a prisoner, to suffer a shameful death."

"Boh we'st set him free, oly prior," cried Ashbead. "We'n meayed up our moinds to 't. Yo just wait till he cums."

"Nay, I command you to desist from the attempt, if any such you meditate," rejoined the prior; "it will avail nothing, and you will only sacrifice your own lives. Our enemies are too strong. The abbot himself would give you like counsel."

Scarcely were the words uttered than from the great gate of the abbey there issued a dozen arquebussiers with an officer at their head, who marched directly towards the kneeling hinds, evidently with the intention of dispersing them. Behind them strode Nicholas Demdike. In an instant the alarmed rustics were on their feet, and Ruchot o' Roaph's,

and some few among them, took to their heels, but Ashbead, Hal o' Nabs, with half-a-dozen others, stood their ground manfully. The monks remained in the hope of preventing any violence. Presently the halberdiers came up.

"That is the ringleader," cried the officer, who proved to be Richard Assheton, pointing out Ashbead, "seize him."

"Naw mon shall lay honts o' meh," cried Cuthbert.

And as the guard pushed past the monks to execute their leader's order, he sprang forward, and wresting a halbert from the foremost of them, stood upon his defence.

"Seize him, I say," shouted Assheton, irritated at the resistance offered.

"Keep off," cried Ashbead, "yo'd best. Loike a stag at bey ey'm dawngerous. Waar horns! waar horns! ey sey."

The arquebussiers looked irresolute. It was evident Ashbead would only be taken with life, and they were not sure that it was their leader's purpose to destroy him.

"Put down thy weapon, Cuthbert," interposed the prior; "it will avail thee nothing against odds like these."

"Mey be, oly prior," rejoined Ashbead, flourishing the pike; "boh ey'st ony yield wi' loife."

"I will disarm him," cried Demdike, stepping forward.

"Theaw!" retorted Ashbead, with a scornful laugh, "Cum on then. Hadsta aw t' fiends i' hell at te back, ey shouldna fear thee."

"Yield!" cried Demdike, in a voice of thunder, and fixing a terrible glance upon him.

"Cum on, wizard," rejoined Ashbead, undauntedly. But, observing that his opponent was wholly unarmed, he gave the pike to Hal o' Nabs, who was close beside him, observing, "It shall never be said that Cuthbert Ashbead feawt t' dule himsel unfairly. Nah, touch meh if theaw dar'st."

Demdike required no further provocation. With almost supernatural force and quickness he sprung upon the forester, and seized him by the throat. But the active young man freed himself from the gripe, and closed with his assailant. But though of Herculean build, it soon became evident that Ashbead would have the worst of it, when Hal o' Nabs, who had watched the struggle with intense interest, could not help coming to his friend's assistance, and made a push at Demdike with the halbert.

Could it be that the wrestlers shifted their position, or that the wizard was indeed aided by the powers of darkness? None could tell, but so it was that the pike pierced the side of Ashbead, who instantly fell to the ground, with his adversary upon him. The next instant his hold relaxed, and the wizard sprang to his feet unharmed, but deluged in blood. Hal o' Nabs uttered a cry of keenest anguish, and, flinging himself upon the body of the forester, tried to staunch the wound; but he was quickly seized by the arquebussiers, and his hands tied behind his back with a thong, while Ashbead was lifted up and borne towards the abbey, the monks and rustics following slowly after; but the latter were not permitted to enter the gate.

As the unfortunate keeper, who by this time had become insensible from loss of blood, was carried along the walled enclosure leading to the abbot's lodging, a female with a child in her arms was seen advancing from the opposite side. She was tall, finely formed, with features of remarkable beauty, though of a masculine and somewhat savage character, and with magnificent but fierce black eyes. Her skin was dark, and her hair raven black, contrasting strongly with the red band wound around it. Her kirtle was of murrey-coloured serge; simply, but becomingly fashioned. A glance sufficed

to show her how matters stood with poor Ashbead, and uttering a sharp angry cry, she rushed towards him.

"What have you done?" she cried, fixing a keen, reproachful look on Demdike, who walked beside the wounded man.

"Nothing," replied Demdike, with a bitter laugh, "the fool has been hurt with a pike. Stand out of the way, Bess, and let the men pass. They are about to carry him to the cell under the chapter-house."

"You shall not take him there," cried Bess Demdike, fiercely. "He may recover if his wound be dressed. Let him go to the infirmary — ha, I forgot — there is no one there now."

"Father Bancroft is at the gate," observed one of the arquebussiers, "he used to act as chirurgeon in the abbey."

"No monk must enter the gate except the prisoners when they arrive," observed Assheton; "such are the positive orders of the Earl of Derby."

"It is not needed," observed Demdike, "no human aid can save the man."

"But can other aid save him?" said Bess, breathing the words in her husband's ears.

"Go to," cried Demdike, pushing her roughly aside; "wouldst have me save thy lover?"

"Take heed," said Bess, in a deep whisper; "if thou save him not, by the devil thou servest! thou shalt lose me and thy child."

Demdike did not think proper to contest the point, but approaching Assheton, requested that the wounded man might be conveyed to an arched recess, which he pointed out. Assent being given, Ashbead was taken there, and placed upon the ground, after which the arquebussiers and their leader marched off, while Bess, kneeling down, supported

the head of the wounded man upon her knee, and Demdike, taking a small phial from his doublet, poured some of its contents down his throat. The wizard then took a fold of linen, with which he was likewise provided, and dipping it in the elixir, applied it to the wound.

In a few moments Ashbead opened his eyes, and looking round wildly, fixed his gaze upon Bess, who placed her finger upon her lips to enjoin silence, but he could not, or would not, understand the sign.

"Aw's o'er wi' meh, Bess," he groaned, "but ey'd reyther dee thus, wi' thee besoide meh, than i' ony other wey."

"Hush!" exclaimed Bess, "Nicholas is here."

"Oh! ey see," replied the wounded man, looking round, "boh whot matters it? Ey'st be gone soon. Ah, Bess, dear lass, if theawdst promise to break thy compact wi' Satan — to repent and save thy precious sowl—ey should dee content."

"Oh do not talk thus!" cried Bess. "You will soon be well again."

"Listen to me," continued Ashbead, earnestly, "dust na knoa that if thy babe be na bapteesed efore to-morrow neet it 'll be sacrificed to t' Prince o' Darkness. Go to some o't oly feythers — confess thy sins an' implore heaven's forgiveness — an' mayhap they 'll save thee an' thy infant."

"And be burned as a witch," rejoined Bess, fiercely. "It is useless, Cuthbert, I have tried them all. I have knelt to them, implored them, but their hearts are hard as flints. They will not heed me. They will not disobey the abbot's cruel injunctions, though he be their superior no longer. But I shall be avenged upon him — terribly avenged."

"Leave meh, theaw wicked woman," cried Ashbead; "ey dunna wish to ha' thee near meh. Let meh dee i' peace."

"Thou wilt not die, I tell thee, Cuthbert," cried Bess; "Nicholas hath staunched thy wound."

"He stawncht it, seyst to?" cried Ashbead, raising. "Ey'st never owe meh loife to him."

And before he could be prevented he tore off the bandage, and the blood burst forth anew.

"It is not my fault if he perishes now," observed Demdike, moodily.

"Help him — help him!" implored Bess.

"He shanna touch meh," cried Ashbead, struggling and increasing the effusion. "Keep him off ey adjure thee. Farewell, Bess," he added, sinking back utterly exhausted by the effort.

"Cuthbert!" screamed Bess, terrified by his looks, "Cuthbert! art thou really dying? Look at me, speak to me! Ha!" she cried, as if seized by a sudden idea, "they say the blessing of a dying man will avail. Bless my child, Cuthbert, bless it!"

"Give it me!" groaned the forester.

Bess held the infant towards him, but before he could place his hands upon it all power forsook him, and he fell back and expired.

"Lost! lost! for ever lost!" cried Bess, with a wild shriek.

At this moment a loud blast was blown from the gate-tower, and a trumpeter called out,

"The abbot and the two other prisoners are coming."

"To thy feet, wench," cried Demdike, imperiously, and seizing the bewildered woman by the arm, "to thy feet, and come with me to meet him."

CHAPTER IV.

The malediction.

THE captive ecclesiastics, together with the strong escort by which they were attended, under the command of John Braddyll, the high sheriff of the county, had passed the previous night at Whitewell, in Bowland Forest; and the abbot, before setting out on his final journey, was permitted to spend an hour in prayer in a little chapel on an adjoining hill, overlooking a most picturesque portion of the forest, the beauties of which were enhanced by the windings of the Hodder, one of the loveliest streams in Lancashire. His devotions performed, Paslew, attended by a guard, slowly descended the hill, and gazed his last on scenes familiar to him almost from infancy. Noble trees, which now looked like old friends, to whom he was bidding an eternal adieu, stood around him. Beneath them, at the end of a glade, couched a herd of deer, which started off at sight of the intruders, and made him envy their freedom and fleetness as he followed them in thought to their solitudes. At the foot of a steep rock ran the Hodder, making the pleasant music of other days as it dashed over its pebbly bed, and recalling times, when free from all care, he had strayed by its wood-fringed banks, to listen to the pleasant sound of running waters, and watch the shining pebbles beneath them, and the swift trout and dainty umber glancing past.

A bitter pang was it to part with scenes so fair, and the abbot spoke no word, nor even looked up, until, passing Little Mitton, he came in sight of Whalley Abbey. Then collecting all his energies, he prepared for the shock he was about to endure. But nerved as he was, his firmness was sorely tried when he beheld the stately pile, once his own, now gone from him and his for ever. He gave one fond

glance towards it, and then painfully averting his gaze, recited, in a low voice, this supplication:

"*Miserere mei Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam. Et secundum multitudinem miserationum tuarum, dele iniquitatem meam. Amplius lava me ab iniquitate meâ, et à peccato meo munda me.*"

But other thoughts, and other emotions, crowded upon him, when he beheld the groups of his old retainers advancing to meet him: men, women, and children, pouring forth loud lamentations, prostrating themselves at his feet, and deploring his doom. The abbot's fortitude had a severe trial here, and the tears sprung to his eyes. The devotion of these poor people touched him more sharply than the severity of his adversaries.

"Bless ye! bless ye! my children," he cried; "repine not for me, for I bear my cross with resignation. It is for me to bewail your lot, much fearing that the flock I have so long and so zealously tended will fall into the hands of other and less heedful pastors, or still worse, of devouring wolves. Bless ye, my children, and be comforted. Think of the end of Abbot Paslew, and for what he suffered."

"Think that he was a traitor to the king, and took up arms in rebellion against him," cried the sheriff, riding up, and speaking in a loud voice; "and that for his heinous offences he was justly condemned to death."

Murmurs arose at this speech, but they were instantly checked by the escort.

"Think charitably of me, my children," said the abbot, "and the blessed Virgin keep you steadfast in your faith. Benedicite!"

"Be silent, traitor, I command thee," cried the sheriff, striking him with his gauntlet in the face.

The abbot's pale cheek burnt crimson, and his eye flashed fire, but he controlled himself, and answered meekly,

"Thou didst not speak in such wise, John Braddyll, when I saved thee from the flood."

"Which flood thou thyself caused to burst forth by devilish arts," rejoined the sheriff. "I owe thee little for the service. If for naught else thou deservest death for thy evil doings on that night."

The abbot made no reply, for Braddyll's allusion conjured up a sombre train of thought within his breast, awakening apprehensions which he could neither account for, nor shake off. Meanwhile, the cavalcade slowly approached the north-east gateway of the abbey — passing through crowds of kneeling and sorrowing bystanders, — but so deeply was the abbot engrossed by the one dread idea that possessed him, that he saw them not, and scarce heard their woeful lamentations. All at once the cavalcade stopped, and the sheriff rode on to the gate, in the opening of which some ceremony was observed. Then it was that Paslew raised his eyes, and beheld standing before him a tall man, with a woman beside him bearing an infant in her arms. The eyes of the pair were fixed upon him with vindictive exultation. He would have averted his gaze, but an irresistible fascination withheld him.

"Thou seest all is prepared," said Demdike, coming close up to the mule, on which Paslew was mounted, and pointing to the gigantic gallows, looming above the abbey walls; "wilt thou now accede to my request?" And then he added, significantly — "on the same terms as before."

The abbot understood his meaning well. Life and freedom were offered him by a being, whose power to accomplish his promise he did not doubt. The struggle was hard; but he resisted the temptation, and answered firmly,

"No."

"Then die the felon death thou meritest," cried Bess, fiercely; "and I will glut mine eyes with the spectacle."

Incensed beyond endurance, the abbot looked sternly at her, and raised his hand, in denunciation. The action and the look were so appalling, that the affrighted woman would have fled if her husband had not restrained her.

"By the holy patriarchs and prophets; by the prelates and confessors; by the doctors of the church; by the holy abbots, monks, and eremites, who dwelt in solitudes, in mountains, and in caverns; by the holy saints and martyrs, who suffered torture and death for their faith, I curse thee, witch," cried Paslew. "May the malediction of Heaven and all its hosts alight on the head of thy infant—"

"Oh! holy abbot," shrieked Bess, breaking from her husband, and flinging herself at Paslew's feet, "curse me, if thou wilt, but spare my innocent child. Save it, and we will save thee."

"Avoid thee, wretched and impious woman," rejoined the abbot; "I have pronounced the dread anathema, and it cannot be recalled. Look at the dripping garments of thy child. In blood has it been baptised, and through blood-stained paths shall its course be taken."

"Ha!" shrieked Bess, noticing for the first time the ensanguined condition of the infant's attire. "Cuthbert's blood — oh!"

"Listen to me, wicked woman," pursued the abbot, as if filled with a prophetic spirit. "Thy child's life shall be long— beyond the ordinary term of woman, — but it shall be a life of woe and ill."

"Oh! stay him — stay him; or I shall die!" cried Bess.

But the wizard could not speak. A greater power than his own apparently overmastered him.

"Children shall she have," continued the abbot, "and

children's children, but they shall be a race doomed and accursed — a brood of adders, that the world shall flee from and crush. A thing accursed, and shunned by her fellows shall thy daughter be, — evil reputed and evil doing. No hand to help her — no lip to bless her — life a burden, and death — long, long in coming — finding her in a dismal dungeon. Now, depart from me, and trouble me no more."

Bess made a motion as if she would go, and then turning partly round, dropped heavily on the ground. Demdike caught the child, ere she fell.

"Thou hast killed her!" he cried to the abbot.

"A stronger voice than mine hath spoken, if it be so," rejoined Paslew. "*Fuge miserrime, fuge maleficæ, quia judex adest iratus.*"

At this moment, the trumpet again sounded, and the cavalcade being put in motion, the abbot and his fellow-captives passed through the gate.

Dismounting from their mules within the court, before the chapter-house, the captive ecclesiastics, preceded by the sheriff, were led to the principal chamber of the structure, where the Earl of Derby awaited them, seated in the Gothic carved oak chair, formerly occupied by the abbots of Whalley on the occasions of conferences or elections. The earl was surrounded by his officers, and the chamber was filled with armed men. The abbot slowly advanced towards the earl. His deportment was dignified and firm, even majestic. The exaltation of spirit, occasioned by the interview with Demdike and his wife, had passed away, and was succeeded by a profound calm. The hue of his cheek was livid, but otherwise he seemed wholly unmoved.

The ceremony of delivering up the bodies of the prisoners to the earl was gone through by the sheriff, and their sentences were then read aloud by a clerk. After this the earl, who had

hitherto remained covered, took off his cap, and in a solemn voice spoke:—

"John Paslew, somewhile abbot of Whalley, but now an attainted and condemned felon, and John Eastgate and William Haydocke, formerly brethren of the same monastery, and confederates with him in crime, ye have heard your doom. To-morrow you shall die the ignominious death of traitors, but the king in his mercy, having regard not so much to the heinous nature of your offences towards his sovereign majesty as to the sacred offices you once held, and of which you have been shamefully deprived, is graciously pleased to remit that part of your sentence, whereby ye are condemned to be quartered alive, willing that the hearts which conceived so much malice and violence against him should cease to beat within your own bosoms, and that the arms which were raised in rebellion against him should be interred in one common grave with the trunks to which they belong."

"God save the high and puissant king, Henry the Eighth, and free him from all traitors!" cried the clerk.

"We humbly thank his majesty for his clemency," said the abbot, amid the profound silence that ensued; "and I pray you, my good lord, when you shall write to the king concerning us, to say to his majesty that we died penitent of many and grave offences, amongst the which is chiefly that of having taken up arms unlawfully against him, but that we did so solely with the view of freeing his highness from evil counsellors, and of re-establishing our holy church, for the which we would willingly die, if our death might in anywise profit it."

"Amen!" exclaimed Father Eastgate, who stood with his hands crossed upon his breast, close behind Paslew. "The abbot hath uttered my sentiments."

"He hath not uttered mine," cried Father Haydocke. "I ask no grace from the bloody Herodias, and will accept none.

What I have done I would do again, were the past to return — nay, I would do more—I would find a way to reach the tyrant's heart, and thus free our church from its worst enemy, and the land from a ruthless oppressor."

"Remove him," said the earl, "the vile traitor shall be dealt with as he merits. For you," he added, as the order was obeyed, and addressing the other prisoners, "and especially you, John Paslew, who have shown some compunction for your crimes, and to prove to you that the king is not the ruthless tyrant he hath been just represented, I hereby in his name promise you any boon, which you may ask consistently with your situation. What favour would you have shown you?"

The abbot reflected for a moment.

"Speak thou, John Eastgate," said the Earl of Derby, seeing that the abbot was occupied in thought.

"If I may proffer a request, my lord," replied the monk, "it is that our poor distraught brother, William Haydocke, be spared the quartering block. He meant not what he said."

"Well, be it as thou wilt," replied the earl, bending his brows, "though he ill deserves such grace. Now, John Paslew, what wouldst thou?"

Thus addressed, the abbot looked up.

"I would have made the same request as my brother, John Eastgate, if he had not anticipated me, my lord," said Paslew; "but since his petition is granted, I would, on my own part, entreat that mass be said for us in the convent church. Many of the brethren are without the abbey, and, if permitted, will assist at its performance."

"I know not if I shall not incur the king's displeasure in assenting," replied the Earl of Derby, after a little reflection; "but I will hazard it. Mass for the dead shall be said in the church at midnight, and all the brethren who choose to come thither shall be permitted to assist at it. They will attend, I

doubt not, for it will be the last time the rites of the Romish church will be performed in those walls. They shall have all required for the ceremonial."

"Heaven's blessings on you, my lord," said the abbot.

"But first pledge me your sacred word," said the earl, "by the holy office you once held, and by the saints in whom you trust, that this concession shall not be made the means of any attempt at flight."

"I swear it," replied the abbot, earnestly.

"And I also swear it," added Father Eastgate.

"Enough," said the earl. "I will give the requisite orders. Notice of the celebration of mass at midnight shall be proclaimed without the abbey. Now remove the prisoners."

Upon this, the captive ecclesiastics were led forth. Father Eastgate was taken to a strong room in the lower part of the chapter-house, where all acts of discipline had been performed by the monks, and where the knotted lash, the spiked girdle, and the hair shirt had once hung; while the abbot was conveyed to his old chamber, which had been prepared for his reception, and there left alone.

CHAPTER V.

The midnight mass.

DOLEFULLY sounds the All Souls' bell from the tower of the convent church. The bell is one of five, and has obtained the name because it is tolled only for those about to pass away from life. Now it rings the knell of three souls to depart on the morrow. Brightly illumined is the fane, within which no taper hath gleamed since the old worship ceased, showing that preparations are made for the last service. The organ, dumb so long, breathes a low prelude. Sad is it to hear that knell—

sad to view those gloriously-dyed panes—and to think why the one rings and the other is lighted up.

Word having gone forth of the midnight mass, all the ejected brethren flock to the abbey. Some have toiled through miry and scarce passable roads. Others have come down from the hills, and forded deep streams at the hazard of life, rather than go round by the far-off bridge, and arrive too late. Others, who conceive themselves in peril from the share they have taken in the late insurrection, quit their secure retreats, and expose themselves to capture. It may be a snare laid for them, but they run the risk. Others, coming from a yet greater distance, beholding the illuminated church from afar, and catching the sound of the bell tolling, at intervals, hurry on, and reach the gate breathless and well-nigh exhausted. But no questions are asked. All who present themselves in ecclesiastical habits are permitted to enter, and take part in the procession forming in the cloister, or proceed at once to the church, if they prefer it.

Dolefully sounds the bell. Barefooted brethren meet together, sorrowfully salute each other, and form in a long line in the great area of the cloisters. At their head are six monks bearing tall lighted candles. After them come the quiristers, and then one carrying the Host, between the incense bearers. Next comes a youth, holding the bell. Next are placed the dignitaries of the church, the prior ranking first, and the others standing two and two, according to their degrees. Near the entrance of the refectory, which occupies the whole south side of the quadrangle, stand a band of halberdiers, whose torches cast a ruddy glare on the opposite tower and buttresses of the convent church, revealing the statues not yet plucked from their niches, the crosses on the pinnacles, and the gilt image of Saint Gregory de Northbury, still holding its place over the porch. Another band are stationed near the mouth

of the vaulted passage under the chapter-house and vestry, whose gray, irregular walls, pierced by numberless richly ornamented windows, and surmounted by small turrets, form a beautiful boundary on the right; while a third party are planted on the left, in the open space, beneath the dormitory, the torchlight flashing ruddily upon the hoary pillars and groined arches sustaining the vast structure above them.

Dolefully sounds the bell. And the ghostly procession thrice tracks the four ambulatories of the cloisters, solemnly chanting a requiem for the dead.

Dolefully sounds the bell. And at its summons all the old retainers of the abbot press to the gate, and sue for admittance, but in vain. They, therefore, mount the neighbouring hill commanding the abbey, and as the solemn sounds float faintly by, and glimpses are caught of the white-robed brethren gliding along the cloisters, and rendered phantom-like by the torchlight, the beholders half imagine it must be a company of sprites, and that the departed monks have been permitted for an hour to assume their old forms, and revisit their old haunts.

Dolefully sounds the bell. And two biers, covered with palls, are borne slowly towards the church, followed by a tall monk.

The clock was on the stroke of twelve. The procession having drawn up within the court in front of the abbot's lodging, the prisoners were brought forth, and at sight of the abbot the whole of the monks fell on their knees. A touching sight was it to see those reverend men prostrate before their ancient superior,—he condemned to die, and they deprived of their monastic home, — and the officer had not the heart to interfere. Deeply affected, Paslew advanced to the prior, and raising him, affectionately embraced him. After this, he addressed some words of comfort to the others, who arose as he enjoined them, and at a signal from the officer, the procession

set out for the church, singing the "*Placebo.*" The abbot and his fellow captives brought up the rear, with a guard on either side of them. All Souls' bell tolled dolefully the while.

Meanwhile, an officer entered the great hall, where the Earl of Derby was feasting with his retainers, and informed him that the hour appointed for the ceremonial was close at hand. The earl arose and went to the church attended by Braddyll and Assheton. He entered by the western porch, and proceeding to the choir, seated himself in the magnificently-carved stall formerly used by Paslew, and placed where it stood, a hundred years before, by John Eccles, ninth abbot.

Midnight struck. The great door of the church swung open, and the organ pealed forth the "*De profundis.*" The aisles were filled with armed men, but a clear space was left for the procession, which presently entered in the same order as before, and moved slowly along the transept. Those who came first thought it a dream, so strange was it to find themselves once again in the old accustomed church. The good prior melted into tears.

At length, the abbot came. To him the whole scene appeared like a vision. The lights streaming from the altar — the incense loading the air — the deep diapasons rolling overhead — the well-known faces of the brethren — the familiar aspect of the sacred edifice — all these filled him with emotions too painful almost for endurance. It was the last time he should visit this holy place — the last time he should hear those solemn sounds — the last time he should behold those familiar objects — ay, the last! Death could have no pang like this! And with heart well-nigh bursting, and limbs scarcely serving their office, he tottered on.

Another trial awaited him, and one for which he was wholly unprepared. As he drew near the chancel, he looked

down an opening on the right, which seemed purposely preserved by the guard. Why were those tapers burning in the side chapel? What was within it? He looked again, and beheld two uncovered biers. On one lay the body of a woman. He started. In the beautiful, but fierce, features of the dead he beheld the witch, Bess Demdike. She was gone to her account before him. The malediction he had pronounced upon her child had killed her.

Appalled, he turned to the other bier, and recognised Cuthbert Ashbead. He shuddered, but comforted himself that he was at least guiltless of his death; though he had a strange feeling that the poor forester had in some way perished for him.

But his attention was diverted towards a tall monk in the Cistertian habit, standing between the bodies, with the cowl drawn over his face. As Paslew gazed at him, the monk slowly raised his hood, and partially disclosed features that smote the abbot as if he had beheld a spectre. Could it be? Could fancy cheat him thus? He looked again. The monk was still standing there, but the cowl had dropped over his face. Striving to shake off the horror that possessed him, the abbot staggered forward, and reaching the presbytery, sank upon his knees.

The ceremonial then commenced. The solemn requiem was sung by the choir; and three yet living heard the hymn for the repose of their souls. Always deeply impressive, the service was unusually so on this sad occasion, and the melodious voices of the singers never sounded so mournfully sweet as then — the demeanour of the prior never seemed so dignified, nor his accents so touching and solemn. The sternest hearts were softened.

But the abbot found it impossible to fix his attention on the service. The lights at the altar burnt dimly in his eyes — the

loud antiphon and the supplicatory prayer fell upon a listless ear. His whole life was passing in review before him. He saw himself as he was when he first professed his faith, and felt the zeal and holy aspirations that filled him then. Years flew by at a glance, and he found himself sub-deacon; the sub-deacon became deacon; and the deacon, sub-prior, and the end of his ambition seemed plain before him. But he had a rival; his fears told him a superior in zeal and learning; one who, though many years younger than he, had risen so rapidly in favour with the ecclesiastical authorities, that he threatened to outstrip him, even now, when the goal was full in view. The darkest passage of his life approached: a crime which should cast a deep shadow over the whole of his brilliant after-career. He would have shunned its contemplation, if he could. In vain. It stood out more palpably than all the rest. His rival was no longer in his path. How he was removed the abbot did not dare to think. But he was gone for ever, unless the tall monk were he!

Unable to endure this terrible retrospect, Paslew strove to bend his thoughts on other things. The choir was singing the "*Dies Iræ*," and their voices thundered forth: —

> Rex tremendæ majestatis,
> Qui salvandos salvas gratis,
> Salva me fons pietatis!

Fain would the abbot have closed his ears, and hoping to stifle the remorseful pangs that seized upon his very vitals with the sharpness of serpents' teeth, he strove to dwell upon the frequent and severe acts of penance he had performed. But he now found that his penitence had never been sincere and efficacious. This one damning sin obscured all his good actions; and he felt if he died unconfessed, and with the weight of guilt upon his soul, he should perish everlastingly.

Again he fled from the torment of retrospection, and again heard the choir thundering forth —

Lacrymosa dies illa,
Quâ resurget ex favillâ
Judicandus homo reus.
Huic ergo parce, Deus!
Pie Iesu Domine!
Dona eis requiem.

"Amen!" exclaimed the abbot. And bowing his head to the ground, he earnestly repeated —

"Pie Jesu Domine!
Dona eis requiem."

Then he looked up, and resolved to ask for a confessor, and unburthen his soul without delay.

The offertory and post-communion were over; the "*requiescant in pace*" — awful words addressed to living ears — were pronounced; and the mass was ended.

All prepared to depart. The prior descended from the altar to embrace and take leave of the abbot; and, at the same time, the Earl of Derby came from the stall.

"Has all been done to your satisfaction, John Paslew?" demanded the earl, as he drew near.

"All, my good lord," replied the abbot, lowly inclining his head; "and I pray you think me not importunate, if I prefer one other request. I would fain have a confessor visit me, that I may lay bare my inmost heart to him, and receive absolution."

"I have already anticipated the request," replied the earl, "and have provided a priest for you. He shall attend you, within an hour, in your own chamber. You will have ample time between this and daybreak, to settle your accounts with Heaven, should they be ever so weighty."

"I trust so, my lord," replied Paslew; "but a whole life is scarcely long enough for repentance, much less a few short

hours. But in regard to the confessor," he continued, filled with misgiving by the earl's manner, "I should be glad to be shriven by Father Christopher Smith, late prior of the abbey."

"It may not be," replied the earl, sternly and decidedly. "You will find all you can require in him I shall send."

The abbot sighed, seeing that remonstrance was useless.

"One further question I would address to you, my lord," he said, "and that refers to the place of my interment. Beneath our feet lie buried all my predecessors — Abbots of Whalley. Here lies John Eccles, for whom was carved the stall, in which your lordship hath sat, and from which I have been dethroned. Here rests the learned John Lyndelay, fifth abbot; and beside him his immediate predecessor, Robert de Topcliffe, who, two hundred and thirty years ago, on the festival of Saint Gregory, our canonised abbot, commenced the erection of the sacred edifice above us. At that epoch were here enshrined the remains of the saintly Gregory, and here were also brought the bodies of Helias de Workesley and John de Belfield, both prelates of piety and wisdom. You may read the names where you stand, my lord. You may count the graves of all the abbots. They are sixteen in number. There is one grave yet unoccupied — one stone yet unfurnished with an effigy in brass."

"Well?" said the Earl of Derby.

"When I sat in that stall, my lord," pursued Paslew, pointing to the abbot's chair; "when I was head of this church, it was my thought to rest here among my brother abbots."

"You have forfeited the right," replied the earl, sternly. "All the abbots, whose dust is crumbling beneath us, died in the odour of sanctity; loyal to their sovereigns, and true to their country; whereas you will die an attainted felon and

rebel. You can have no place amongst them. Concern not yourself further in the matter. I will find a fitting grave for you, — perchance at the foot of the gallows."

And turning abruptly away, he gave the signal for general departure.

Ere the clock in the church tower had tolled one, the lights were extinguished, and of the priestly train who had recently thronged the fane, all were gone, like a troop of ghosts evoked at midnight by necromantic skill, and then suddenly dismissed. Deep silence again brooded in the aisles; hushed was the organ; mute the melodious choir. The only light penetrating the convent church proceeded from the moon, whose rays, shining through the painted windows, fell upon the graves of the old abbots in the presbytery, and on the two biers within the adjoining chapel, whose stark burthens they quickened into fearful semblance of life.

CHAPTER VI.

Teter et fortis carcer.

Left alone, and unable to pray, the abbot strove to dissipate his agitation of spirit by walking to and fro within his chamber; and while thus occupied, he was interrupted by a guard, who told him that the priest sent by the Earl of Derby was without, and immediately afterwards the confessor was ushered in. It was the tall monk, who had been standing between the biers, and his features were still shrouded by his cowl. At sight of him, Paslew sank upon a seat and buried his face in his hands. The monk offered him no consolation, but waited in silence till he should again look up. At last Paslew took courage and spoke.

"Who, and what are you?" he demanded.

"A brother of the same order as yourself," replied the

monk, in deep and thrilling accents, but without raising his hood; "and I am come to hear your confession by command of the Earl of Derby."

"Are you of this abbey?" asked Paslew, tremblingly.

"I was," replied the monk, in a stern tone; "but the monastery is dissolved, and all the brethren ejected."

"Your name?" cried Paslew.

"I am not come here to answer questions, but to hear a confession," rejoined the monk. "Bethink you of the awful situation in which you are placed, and that before many hours you must answer for the sins you have committed. You have yet time for repentance, if you delay it not."

"You are right, father," replied the abbot. "Be seated, I pray you, and listen to me, for I have much to tell. Thirty and one years ago I was prior of this abbey. Up to that period my life had been blameless, or if not wholly free from fault, I had little wherewith to reproach myself — little to fear from a merciful judge — unless it were that I indulged too strongly the desire of ruling absolutely in the house in which I was then only second. But Satan had laid a snare for me, into which I blindly fell. Among the brethren was one named Borlace Alvetham, a young man of rare attainment, and singular skill in the occult sciences. He had risen in favour, and at the time I speak of was elected sub-prior."

"Go on," said the monk.

"It began to be whispered about within the abbey," pursued Paslew, "that on the death of William Rede, then abbot, Borlace Alvetham, would succeed him, and then it was that bitter feelings of animosity were awakened in my breast against the sub-prior, and after many struggles, I resolved upon his destruction."

"A wicked resolution," cried the monk; "but proceed."

"I pondered over the means of accomplishing my pur-

pose," resumed Paslew, "and at last decided upon accusing Alvetham of sorcery and magical practices. The accusation was easy, for the occult studies in which he indulged laid him open to the charge. He occupied a chamber overlooking the Calder, and used to break the monastic rules by wandering forth at night upon the hills. When he was absent thus one night, accompanied by others of the brethren, I visited his chamber, and examined his papers, some of which were covered with mystical figures and cabalistic characters. These papers I seized, and a watch was set to make prisoner of Alvetham on his return. Before dawn he appeared, and was instantly secured, and placed in close confinement. On the next day he was brought before the assembled conclave in the chapter-house, and examined. His defence was unavailing. I charged him with the terrible crime of witchcraft, and he was found guilty."

A hollow groan broke from the monk, but he offered no other interruption.

"He was condemned to die a fearful and lingering death," pursued the abbot; "and it devolved upon me to see the sentence carried out."

"And no pity for the innocent moved you?" cried the monk. "You had no compunction?"

"None," replied the abbot. "I rather rejoiced in the successful accomplishment of my scheme. The prey was fairly in my toils, and I would give him no chance of escape. Not to bring scandal upon the abbey, it was decided that Alvetham's punishment should be secret."

"A wise resolve," observed the monk.

"Within the thickness of the dormitory walls is contrived a small, singularly-formed dungeon," continued the abbot. "It consists of an arched cell, just large enough to hold the body of a captive, and permit him to stretch himself upon a

straw pallet. A narrow staircase mounts upwards to a grated aperture in one of the buttresses to admit air and light. Other opening is there none. *'Teter et fortis carcer,'* is this dungeon styled, in our monastic rolls, and it is well described, for it is black and strong enough. Food is admitted to the miserable inmate of the cell by means of a revolving stone, but no interchange of speech can be held with those without. A large stone is removed from the wall to admit the prisoner, and once immured, the masonry is mortised, and made solid as before. The wretched captive does not long survive his doom, or it may be he lives too long, for death must be a release from such protracted misery. In this dark cell one of the evil-minded brethren, who essayed to stab the Abbot of Kirkstall in the chapter-house, was thrust, and ere a year was over, the provisions were untouched — and the man being known to be dead, they were stayed. His skeleton was found within the cell when it was opened to admit Borlace Alvetham."

"Poor captive!" groaned the monk.

"Ay, poor captive!" echoed Paslew. "Mine eyes have often striven to pierce those stone walls, and see him lying there in that narrow chamber, or forcing his way upwards, to catch a glimpse of the blue sky above him. When I have seen the swallows settle on the old buttress, or the thin grass growing between the stones waving there, I have thought of him."

"Go on," said the monk.

"I scarce can proceed," rejoined Paslew. "Little time was allowed Alvetham for preparation. That very night the fearful sentence was carried out. The stone was removed, and a new pallet placed in the cell. At midnight the prisoner was brought to the dormitory, the brethren chanting a doleful hymn. There he stood amidst them, his tall form towering

above the rest, and his features pale as death. He protested his innocence, but he exhibited no fear, even when he saw the terrible preparations. When all was ready he was led to the breach. At that awful moment, his eye met mine, and I shall never forget the look. I might have saved him if I had spoken, but I would not speak. I turned away, and he was thrust into the breach. A fearful cry then rang in my ears, but it was instantly drowned by the mallets of the masons employed to fasten up the stone."

There was a pause for a few moments, broken only by the sobs of the abbot. At length, the monk spoke.

"And the prisoner perished in the cell?" he demanded, in a hollow voice.

"I thought so till to-night," replied the abbot "But if he escaped it, it must have been by miracle; or by aid of those powers with whom he was charged with holding commerce."

"He did escape!" thundered the monk, throwing back his hood. "Look up, John Paslew. Look up, false abbot, and recognise thy victim."

"Borlace Alvetham!" cried the abbot. "Is it, indeed, you?"

"You see, and can you doubt?" replied the other. "But you shall now hear how I avoided the terrible death to which you procured my condemnation. You shall now learn how I am here to repay the wrong you did me. We have changed places, John Paslew, since the night when I was thrust into the cell, never, as you hoped, to come forth. You are now the criminal, and I the witness of the punishment."

"Forgive me! oh, forgive me! Borlace Alvetham, since you are, indeed, he!" cried the abbot, falling on his knees.

"Arise, John Paslew!" cried the other, sternly. "Arise, and listen to me. For the damning offences into which I have been led, I hold you responsible. But for you I might have

died free from sin. It is fit you should know the amount of my iniquity. Give ear to me, I say. When first shut within that dungeon, I yielded to the promptings of despair. Cursing you, I threw myself upon the pallet, resolved to taste no food, and hoping death would soon release me. But love of life prevailed. On the second day I took the bread and water allotted me, and ate and drank; after which I scaled the narrow staircase, and gazed through the thin barred loophole at the bright blue sky above, sometimes catching the shadow of a bird as it flew past. Oh! how I yearned for freedom then! Oh, how I wished to break through the stone walls that held me fast! Oh what a weight of despair crushed my heart as I crept back to my narrow bed. The cell seemed like a grave, and indeed it was little better. Horrible thoughts possessed me. What if I should be wilfully forgotten? What if no food should be given me, and I should be left to perish by the slow pangs of hunger? At this idea I shrieked aloud, but the walls alone returned a dull echo to my cries. I beat my hands against the stones, till the blood flowed from them, but no answer was returned; and at last I desisted from sheer exhaustion. Day after day, and night after night, passed in this way. My food regularly came. But I became maddened by solitude; and with terrible imprecations invoked aid from the powers of darkness to set me free. One night, while thus employed, I was startled by a mocking voice, which said,

"'All this fury is needless. Thou hast only to wish for me, and I come.'

"It was profoundly dark. I could see nothing but a pair of red orbs, glowing like flaming carbuncles.

"'Thou wouldst be free,' continued the voice. 'Thou shalt be so. Arise, and follow me.'

"At this, I felt myself grasped by an iron arm, against

which all resistance would have been unavailing, even if I had dared to offer it, and in an instant I was dragged up the narrow steps. The stone wall opened before my unseen conductor, and in another moment we were upon the roof of the dormitory. By the bright starbeams shooting down from above, I discerned a tall shadowy figure standing by my side.

"'Thou art mine,' he cried, in accents graven for ever on my memory; 'but I am a generous master, and will give thee a long term of freedom. Thou shalt be avenged upon thine enemy — deeply avenged.'

"'Grant this, and I am thine,' I replied, a spirit of infernal vengeance possessing me. And I knelt before the fiend.

"'But thou must tarry for awhile,' he answered, 'for thine enemy's time will be long in coming; but it *will* come. I cannot work him immediate harm; but I will lead him to a height from which he will assuredly fall headlong. Thou must depart from this place; for it is perilous to thee, and if thou stayest here, ill will befal thee. I will send a rat to thy dungeon, which shall daily devour the provisions, so that the monks shall not know thou hast fled. In thirty and one years shall the abbot's doom be accomplished. Two years before that time thou mayst return. Then come alone to Pendle Hill on a Friday night, and beat the water of the moss pool on the summit, and I will appear to thee and tell thee more. Nine and twenty years, remember!'

"With these words the shadowy figure melted away, and I found myself standing alone on the mossy roof of the dormitory. The cold stars were shining down upon me, and I heard the howl of the watch-dogs near the gate. The fair abbey slept in beauty around me, and I gnashed my teeth with rage to think that you had made me an outcast from it, and robbed me of a dignity which might have been mine. I was wroth also that my vengeance should be so long delayed.

But I could not remain where I was, so I clambered down the buttress, and fled away."

"Can this be?" cried the abbot, who had listened in rapt wonderment to the narration. "Two years after your immurement in the cell the food having been for some time untouched, the wall was opened, and upon the pallet was found a decayed carcase in mouldering, monkish vestments."

"It was a body taken from the charnel, and placed there by the demon," replied the monk. "Of my long wanderings in other lands and beneath brighter skies I need not tell you, but neither absence nor lapse of years cooled my desire of vengeance, and when the appointed time drew nigh I returned to my own country, and came hither in a lowly garb, under the name of Nicholas Demdike."

"Ha!" exclaimed the abbot.

"I went to Pendle Hill, as directed," pursued the monk. "and saw the Dark Shape there as I beheld it on the dormitory roof. All things were then told me, and I learnt how the late rebellion should rise, and how it should be crushed. I learnt also how my vengeance should be satisfied."

Paslew groaned aloud. A brief pause ensued, and deep emotion marked the accents of the wizard as he proceeded.

"When I came back, all this part of Lancashire resounded with praises of the beauty of Bess Blackburn, a rustic lass who dwelt in Barrowford. She was called the Flower of Pendle, and inflamed all the youths with love, and all the maidens with jealousy. But she favoured none, except Cuthbert Ashbead, forester to the Abbot of Whalley. Her mother would fain have given her to the forester in marriage, but Bess would not be disposed of so easily. I saw her, and became at once enamoured. I thought my heart was seared; but it was not so. The savage beauty of Bess pleased me more than the most refined charms could have done, and her fierce

character harmonised with my own. How I won her matters not, but she cast off all thoughts of Ashbead, and clung to me. My wild life suited her; and she roamed the wastes with me, scaled the hills in my company, and shrank not from the weird meetings I attended. Ill repute quickly attended her, and she became branded as a witch. Her aged mother closed her doors upon her, and those who would have gone miles to meet her, now avoided her. Bess heeded this little. She was of a nature to repay the world's contumely with like scorn, but when her child was born the case became different. She wished to save it. Then it was," pursued Demdike, vehemently, and regarding the abbot with flashing eyes — "then it was that I was again mortally injured by you. Then your ruthless decree to the clergy went forth. My child was denied baptism, and became subject to the fiend."

"Alas! alas!" exclaimed Paslew.

"And as if this were not injury enough," thundered Demdike, "you have called down a withering and lasting curse upon its innocent head, and through it transfixed its mother's heart. If you had complied with that poor girl's request, I would have forgiven you your wrong to me, and have saved you."

There was a long, fearful silence. At last Demdike advanced to the abbot, and seizing his arm, fixed his eyes upon him, as if to search into his soul.

"Answer me, John Paslew!" he cried; "answer me, as you shall speedily answer your Maker. Can that malediction be recalled? Dare not to trifle with me, or I will tear forth your black heart, and cast it in your face. Can that curse be recalled? Speak!"

"It cannot," replied the abbot, half dead with terror.

"Away then!" thundered Demdike, casting him from him. "To the gallows! — to the gallows!" And he rushed out of the room.

CHAPTER VII.

The Abbey mill.

For a while the abbot remained shattered and stupified by this terrible interview. At length, he arose, and made his way, he scarce knew how, to the oratory. But it was long before the tumult of his thoughts could be at all allayed, and he had only just regained something like composure when he was disturbed by hearing a slight sound in the adjoining chamber. A mortal chill came over him, for he thought it might be Demdike returned. Presently, he distinguished a footstep stealthily approaching him, and almost hoped that the wizard would consummate his vengeance by taking his life. But he was quickly undeceived, for a hand was placed on his shoulder, and a friendly voice whispered in his ears, "Cum along wi' meh, lort abbut. Get up, quick — quick!"

Thus addressed, the abbot raised his eyes, and beheld a rustic figure standing beside him, divested of his clouted shoes, and armed with a long bare wood-knife.

"Dunna yo knoa me, lort abbut?" cried the person. "Ey'm a freent — Hal o' Nabs, o' Wiswall. Yo'n moind Wiswall, yeawr own birth-place, abbut? Dunna be feert ey sey. Ey'n getten a steeigh clapt to yon windaw, an' you con be down it i' a trice — an' along t' covert way be t' river soide to t' mill."

But the abbot stirred not.

"Quick! quick!" implored Hal o' Nabs, venturing to pluck the abbot's sleeve. "Every minute 's precious. Dunna be feert. Ebil Croft, t' miller is below. Poor Cuthbert Ashbead would ha' been here i'stead o' meh if he couldn; boh that accursed wizard, Nick Demdike, turned my hont agen him, and drove t' poike head intended for himself into poor Cuthbert's side. They clapt meh i' a dungeon, boh Ebil

monaged to get me out, an' ey then swore to do whot poor Cuthbert would ha' done, if he'd been livin' — so here ey am, lort abbut, cum to set yo free. An neaw yo knoan aw abowt it, yo con ha nah more hesitation. Cum, time presses, ah ey'm feert o' t' guard owerhearing us."

"I thank you, my good friend, from the bottom of my heart," replied the abbot, rising; "but, however strong may be the temptation of life and liberty which you hold out to me, I cannot yield to it. I have pledged my word to the Earl of Derby to make no attempt to escape. Were the doors thrown open, and the guard removed, I should remain where I am."

"Whot!" exclaimed Hal o' Nabs, in a tone of bitter disappointment; "yo winnaw go, neaw aw's prepared. By th' Mess, boh yo shan. Ey'st nah go back to Ebil empty-handed. If yo'n sworn to stay here, ey'n sworn to set yo free, and ey'st keep meh oath. Willy nilly, yo shan go wi' meh, lort abbut!"

"Forbear to urge me further, my good Hal," rejoined Paslew. "I fully appreciate your devotion; and I only regret that you and Abel Croft have exposed yourselves to so much peril on my account. Poor Cuthbert Ashbead! when I beheld his body on the bier, I had a sad feeling that he had died in my behalf."

"Cuthbert meant to rescue yo, lort abbut," replied Hal, "and deed resisting Nick Demdike's attempt to arrest him. Boh, be aw t' devils!" he added, brandishing his knife fiercely, "t' warlock shall ha' three inches o' cowd steel betwixt his ribs, t' furst time ey cum across him."

"Peace, my son," rejoined the abbot, "and forego your bloody design. Leave the wretched man to the chastisement of Heaven. And now, farewell! All your kindly efforts to induce me to fly are vain."

"Yo winnaw go?" cried Hal o' Nabs, scratching his head.

"I cannot," replied the abbot.

"Cum wi' meh to t' windaw, then," pursued Hal, "and tell Ebil so. He'll think ey'n failed else."

"Willingly," replied the abbot.

And with noiseless footsteps he followed the other across the chamber. The window was open, and outside it was reared a ladder.

"Yo mun go down a few steps," said Hal o' Nabs, "or else he'll nah hear yo."

The abbot complied, and partly descended the ladder.

"I see no one," he said.

"T' neet's dark," replied Hal o' Nabs, who was close behind him. "Ebil canna be far off. Hist! ey hear him — go on."

The abbot was now obliged to comply, though he did so with reluctance. Presently he found himself upon the roof of a building, which he knew to be connected with the mill by a covered passage running along the south bank of the Calder. Scarcely had he set foot there, than Hal o' Nabs jumped after him, and, seizing the ladder, cast it into the stream, thus rendering Paslew's return impossible.

"Neaw, lort abbut," he cried, with a low, exulting laugh, "yo hanna brok'n yor word, and ey'n kept moine. Yo're free agen your will."

"You have destroyed me by your mistaken zeal," cried the abbot, reproachfully.

"Nowt o't sort," replied Hal; "ey'n saved yo fro' destruction. This way, lort abbut — this way."

And taking Paslew's arm he led him to a low parapet, overlooking the covered passage before described. Half an hour before it had been bright moonlight, but, as if to favour

the fugitive, the heavens had become overcast, and a thick mist had arisen from the river.

"Ebil! Ebil!" cried Hal o' Nabs, leaning over the parapet.

"Here," replied a voice below. "Is aw reet? Is he wi' yo?"

"Yeigh," replied Hal.

"Whot han yo dun wi' t' steigh?" cried Ebil.

"Never yo moind," returned Hal, "boh help t' abbut down."

Paslew thought it vain to resist further, and with the help of Hal o' Nabs and the miller, and further aided by some irregularities in the wall, he was soon safely landed near the entrance of the passage. Abel fell on his knees, and pressed the abbot's hand to his lips.

"Owr Blessed Leady be braised, yo are free," he cried.

"Dunna stond tawking here, Ebil," interposed Hal o' Nabs, who by this time had reached the ground, and who was fearful of some new remonstrance on the abbot's part. "Ey'm feerd o' pursuit."

"Yo needna be afeerd o' that, Hal," replied the miller. "T' guard are safe enough. One o' owr chaps has just tuk em up a big black jack fu' o' stout ele; an ey warrant me they winnaw stir yet awhoile. Win it please yo to cum wi' me, lort abbut?"

With this, he marched along the passage, followed by the others, and presently arrived at a door, against which he tapped. A bolt being withdrawn, it was instantly opened to admit the party, after which it was as quickly shut, and secured. In answer to a call from the miller, a light appeared at the top of a steep, ladderlike flight of wooden steps, and up these Paslew, at the entreaty of Abel, mounted, and found himself in a large, low chamber, the roof of which was

crossed by great beams, covered thickly with cobwebs, whitened by flour, while the floor was strewn with empty sacks and sieves.

The person who held the light proved to be the miller's daughter, Dorothy, a blooming lass of eighteen, and at the other end of the chamber, seated on a bench before a turf fire, with an infant on her knees, was the miller's wife. The latter instantly arose on beholding the abbot, and placing the child on a corn bin, advanced towards him, and dropped on her knees, while her daughter imitated her example. The abbot extended his hands over them and pronounced a solemn benediction.

"Bring your child, also, to me, that I may bless it," he said, when he concluded.

"It's nah my child, lort abbut," replied the miller's wife, taking up the infant and bringing it to him; "it wur brought to me this varry neet by Ebil. Ey wish it wur far enough, ey'm sure, for it 's a deformed little urchon. One o' its een is lower set than t' other; an t' reet looks up, while t' laft looks down."

And as she spoke she pointed to the infant's face, which was disfigured as she had stated, by a strange and unnatural disposition of the eyes, one of which was set much lower in the head than the other. Awakened from sleep, the child uttered a feeble cry, and stretched out its tiny arms to Dorothy.

"You ought to pity it for its deformity, poor little creature, rather than reproach it, mother," observed the young damsel.

"Marry kem eawt!" cried her mother, sharply, "yo'n getten fine feelings wi' your learning fro t' good feythers, Dolly. Os ey said efore, ey wish t' brat wur far enough."

"You forget it has no mother," suggested Dorothy, kindly.

"An naw great matter, if it hasn't," returned the miller's wife. "Bess Demdike 's neaw great loss."

"Is this Bess Demdike's child?" cried Paslew, recoiling.

"Yeigh," exclaimed the miller's wife. And mistaking the cause of Paslew's emotion, she added, triumphantly, to her daughter, "Ey towd te, wench, ot t' lort abbut would be of my way o' thinking. T' chilt has got the witch's mark plain upon her. Look, lort abbut, look!"

But Paslew heeded her not, but murmured to himself: —

"Ever in my path, go where I will. It is vain to struggle with my fate. I will go back and surrender myself to the Earl of Derby."

"Nah, — nah! — yo shanna do that," replied Hal o' Nabs, who, with the miller, was close beside him. "Sit down o' that stoo' be t' fire, and tak a cup o' wine t' cheer yo, and then we'n set out to Pendle Forest, where ey'st find yo a safe hiding-place. An t' ony reward ey'n ever ask for t' sarvice shan be, that yo'n perform a marriage sarvice fo' me and Dolly one of these days." And he nudged the damsel's elbow, who turned away, covered with blushes.

The abbot moved mechanically to the fire, and sat down, while the miller's wife, surrendering the child with a shrug of the shoulders and a grimace to her daughter, went in search of some viands and a flask of wine, which she set before Paslew. The miller then filled a drinking-horn, and presented it to his guest, was about to raise it to his lips, when a loud knocking was heard at the door below.

The knocking continued with increased violence, and voices were heard calling upon the miller to open the door, or it would be broken down. On the first alarm Abel had flown to a small window whence he could reconnoitre those below, and he now returned with a face white with terror, to say that a party of arquebussiers, with the sheriff at their

head, were without, and that some of the men were provided with torches.

"They have discovered my evasion, and are come in search of me," observed the abbot, rising, but without betraying any anxiety. "Do not concern yourselves further for me, my good friends, but open the door, and deliver me to them."

"Nah, nah, that we winnaw," cried Hal o' Nabs, "yo're neaw taen yet, feayther abbut, an' ey knoa a way to baffle 'em. If yo'n let him down into t' river, Ebil, ey'n manage to get him off."

"Weel thowt on, Nab," cried the miller, "theawst nah been mey mon seven year for nowt. Theaw knoas t' ways o' t' pleck."

"Os weel os onny rotten abowt it," replied Hal o' Nabs. "Go down to t' grindin'-room, an ey'n follow i' a troice."

And as Abel snatched up the light, and hastily descended the steps with Paslew, Hal whispered in Dorothy's ears, —

"Tak care neaw one fonds that chilt, Dolly, if they break in. Hide it safely; an whon they're gone, tak it to t' church, and place it near t' altar, where no ill con cum to it or thee. Mey life may hong upon it."

And as the poor girl, who, as well as her mother, was almost frightened out of her wits, promised compliance, he hurried down the steps after the others, muttering, as the clamour without was redoubled,

"Eigh, roar on till yo're hoarse. Yo winnaw get in yet awhile, ey'n promise ye."

Meantime, the abbot had been led to the chief room of the mill, where all the corn formerly consumed within the monastery had been prepared, and which the size of the chamber itself, together with the vastness of the stones used

in the operation of grinding, and connected with the huge water-wheel outside, proved to be by no means inconsiderable. Strong shafts of timber supported the flooring above, and were crossed by other boards placed horizontally, from which various implements in use at the mill depended, giving the chamber, imperfectly lighted as it now was by the lamp borne by Abel, a strange and almost mysterious appearance. Three or four of the miller's men, armed with pikes, had followed their master, and, though much alarmed, they vowed to die rather than give up the abbot.

By this time Hal o' Nabs had joined the group, and proceeding towards a raised part of the chamber where the grinding-stones were set, he knelt down, and laying hold of a small ring, raised up a trap-door. The fresh air which blew up through the aperture, combined with the rushing sound of water, showed that the Calder flowed immediately beneath; and having made some slight preparation, Hal let himself down into the stream.

At this moment a loud crash was heard, and one of the miller's men cried out that the arquebussiers had burst open the door.

"Be hondy, then, lads, and let him down!" cried Hal o' Nabs, who had some difficulty in maintaining his footing on the rough, stony bottom of the swift stream.

Passively yielding, the abbot suffered the miller and one of the stoutest of his men to assist him through the trap-door, while a third held down the lamp, and showed Hal o' Nabs up to his middle in the darkling current, and stretching out his arms to receive the burden. The light fell upon the huge black circle of the water-wheel now stopped, and upon the dripping arches supporting the mill. In another moment the abbot plunged into the water, the trap-door was replaced, and bolted underneath by Hal, who, while guiding his com-

panion along, and bidding him catch hold of the woodwork of the wheel, heard a heavy trampling of many feet on the boards above, showing that the pursuers had obtained admittance.

Encumbered by his heavy vestments, the abbot could with difficulty contend against the strong current, and he momently expected to be swept away; but he had a stout and active assistant by his side, who soon placed him under shelter of the wheel. The trampling overhead continued for a few minutes, after which all was quiet, and Hal judged that, finding their search within ineffectual, the enemy would speedily come forth. Nor was he deceived. Shouts were soon heard at the door of the mill, and the glare of torches was cast on the stream. Then it was that Hal dragged his companion into a deep hole, formed by some decay in the masonry, behind the wheel, where the water rose nearly to their chins, and where they were completely concealed. Scarcely were they thus ensconced, than two or three armed men, holding torches aloft, were seen wading under the archway; but after looking carefully around, and even approaching close to the water-wheel, these persons could detect nothing, and withdrew, muttering curses of rage and disappointment. By-and-by the lights almost wholly disappeared, and the shouts becoming fainter and more distant, it was evident that the men had gone lower down the river. Upon this, Hal thought they might venture to quit their retreat, and accordingly, grasping the abbot's arm, he proceeded to wade up the stream.

Benumbed with cold, and half dead with terror, Paslew needed all his companion's support, for he could do little to help himself, added to which, they occasionally encountered some large stone, or stepped into a deep hole, so that it required Hal's utmost exertion and strength to force a way

on. At last they were out of the arch, and though both banks seemed unguarded, yet, for fear of surprise, Hal deemed it prudent still to keep to the river. Their course was completely sheltered from observation by the mist that enveloped them; and after proceeding in this way for some distance, Hal stopped to listen, and while debating with himself whether he should now quit the river, he fancied he beheld a black object swimming towards him. Taking it for an otter, with which voracious animal the Calder, a stream swarming with trout, — abounded, and knowing the creature would not meddle with them, unless first attacked, he paid little attention to it; but he was soon made sensible of his error. His arm was suddenly seized by a large black hound, whose sharp fangs met in his flesh. Unable to repress a cry of pain, Hal strove to disengage himself from his assailant, and finding it impossible, flung himself into the water, in the hope of drowning him, but as the hound still maintained his hold, he searched for his knife to slay him. But he could not find it, and in his distress applied to Paslew.

"Ha yo onny weepun abowt yo, lort abbut," he cried, "wi' which ey con free mysel fro' this accussed hound?"

"Alas! no, my son," replied Paslew, "and I fear no weapon will prevail against it, for I recognise in the animal the hound of the wizard, Demdike."

"Ey thowt t' Dule wur in it," rejoined Hal; "boh leave me to fight it owt, and do yo gain t' bonk, an mey t' best o' your way to t' Wiswall. Ey'n join ye os soon os ey con scrush this varment's heaod agen a stoan. Ha!" he added, joyfully, "Ey'n found t' thwittle. Go — go. Ey'n soon be efter ye."

Feeling he should sink if he remained where he was, and wholly unable to offer any effectual assistance to his companion, the abbot turned to the left, where a large oak over-

hung the stream, and he was climbing the bank, aided by the roots of the tree, when a man suddenly came from behind it, seized his hand, and dragged him up forcibly. At the same moment his captor placed a bugle to his lips, and winding a few notes, he was instantly answered by shouts, and soon afterwards half-a-dozen armed men ran up, bearing torches. Not a word passed between the fugitive and his captor, but when the men came up, and the torchlight fell upon the features of the latter, the abbot's worst fears were realised. It was Demdike.

"False to your king! — false to your oath! — false to all men!" cried the wizard. "You seek to escape in vain!"

"I merit all your reproaches," replied the abbot; "but it may be some satisfaction to you to learn that I have endured far greater suffering than if I had patiently awaited my doom."

"I am glad of it," rejoined Demdike, with a savage laugh; "but you have destroyed others beside yourself. Where is the fellow in the water? What, ho, Uriel!"

But as no sound reached him, he snatched a torch from one of the arquebussiers and held it to the river's brink. But he could see neither hound nor man.

"Strange!" he cried. "He cannot have escaped. Uriel is more than a match for any man. Secure the prisoner while I examine the stream."

With this, he ran along the bank with great quickness, holding his torch far over the water, so as to reveal any thing floating within it, but nothing met his view until he came within a short distance of the mill, when he beheld a black object struggling in the current, and soon found that it was his dog making feeble efforts to gain the bank.

"Ah recreant! thou hast let him go," cried Demdike, furiously.

Seeing his master the animal redoubled its efforts, crept ashore, and fell at his feet, with a last effort to lick his hands.

Demdike held down the torch, and then perceived that the hound was quite dead. There was a deep gash in its side, and another in the throat, showing how it had perished.

"Poor Uriel!" he exclaimed; "the only true friend I had. And thou art gone! The villain has killed thee, but he shall pay for it with his life."

And hurrying back he despatched four of the men in quest of the fugitive, while accompanied by the two others he conveyed Paslew back to the abbey, where he was placed in a strong cell, from which there was no possibility of escape, and a guard set over him.

Half an hour after this, two of the arquebussiers returned with Hal o' Nabs, whom they had succeeded in capturing after a desperate resistance, about a mile from the abbey, on the road to Wiswall. He was taken to the guard-room, which had been appointed in one of the lower chambers of the chapter-house, and Demdike was immediately apprised of his arrival. Satisfied by an inspection of the prisoner, whose demeanour was sullen and resolved, Demdike proceeded to the great hall, where the Earl of Derby, who had returned thither after the midnight mass, was still sitting with his retainers. An audience was readily obtained by the wizard, and apparently well pleased with the result, he returned to the guard-room. The prisoner was seated by himself in one corner of the chamber with his hands tied behind his back with a leathern thong, and Demdike approaching him told him that for having aided the escape of a condemned rebel and traitor, and violently assaulting the king's lieges in the execution of their duty, he would be hanged on the morrow, the Earl of Derby, who had power of life or death in

such cases, having so decreed it. And he exhibited the warrant.

"Soh, yo mean to hong me, eh, wizard?" cried Hal o' Nabs, kicking his heels with great apparent indifference.

"I do," replied Demdike; "if for nothing else, for slaying my hound."

"Ey dunna think it," replied Hal. "Yo'n alter your moind. Do, mon. Ey'm nah prepared to dee just yet."

"Then perish in your sins," cried Demdike, "I will not give you an hour's respite."

"Yo'n be sorry when it 's too late," said Hal.

"Tush!" cried Demdike, "my only regret will be that Uriel's slaughter is paid for by such a worthless life as thine."

"Then whoy tak it?" demanded Hal. "'Specially whon yo'n lose your chilt by doing so."

"My child!" exclaimed Demdike, surprised. "How mean you, sirrah?"

"Ey mean this," replied Hal, coolly; "that if ey dee to-morrow mornin' your chilt dees too. Whon ey ondertook this job ey calkilated mey chances, an' tuk precautions eforehond. Your chilt 's a hostage fo mey safety."

"Curses on thee and thy cunning," cried Demdike; "but I will not be outwitted by a hind like thee. I will have the child, and yet not be baulked of my revenge."

"Yo'n never ha' it, except os a breathless corpse, 'bowt mey consent," rejoined Hal.

"We shall see," cried Demdike, rushing forth, and bidding the guards look well to the prisoner.

But ere long he returned with a gloomy and disappointed expression of countenance, and again approaching the prisoner said, "Thou hast spoken the truth. The infant is in the hands of some innocent being over whom I have no power."

"Ey towdee so, wizard," replied Hal, laughing. "Hoind os ey be, ey'm a match fo' thee, — ha! ha! Neaw, mey life agen t' chilt's. Win yo set me free?"

Demdike deliberated.

"Harkee, wizard," cried Hal. "if yo're hatching treason ey'n dun. T' sartunty o' revenge win sweeten mey last moments."

"Will you swear to deliver the child to me, unharmed, if I set you free?" asked Demdike.

"It 's a bargain, wizard," rejoined Hal o' Nabs; "ey swear. Boh yo mun set me free furst, fo' ey winnaw tak your word."

Demdike turned away disdainfully, and addressing the arquebussiers, said, "You behold this warrant, guard. The prisoner is committed to my custody. I will produce him on the morrow, or account for his absence to the Earl of Derby."

One of the arquebussiers examined the order, and vouching for its correctness, the others signified their assent to the arrangement, upon which Demdike motioned the prisoner to follow him, and quitted the chamber. No interruption was offered to Hal's egress, but he stopped within the court-yard, where Demdike awaited him, and unfastened the leathern thong that bound together his hands.

"Now go and bring the child to me," said the wizard.

"Nah, ey'st neaw bring it ye myself," rejoined Hal. "Ey knoas better nor that. Be at t' church porch i' half an hour, an t' bantlin shan be delivered to ye safe an sound."

And without waiting for a reply, he ran off with great swiftness.

At the appointed time Demdike sought the church, and as he drew near it there issued from the porch a female, who hastily placing the child, wrapped in a mantle, in his arms, tarried for no speech from him, but instantly disappeared.

Demdike, however, recognised in her the miller's daughter, Dorothy Croft.

CHAPTER VIII.

The executioner.

Dawn came at last, after a long and weary night to many within and without the abbey. Every thing betokened a dismal day. The atmosphere was damp, and oppressive to the spirits, while the raw cold sensibly affected the frame. All astir were filled with gloom and despondency, and secretly breathed a wish that the tragical business of the day were ended. The vast range of Pendle was obscured by clouds, and ere long the vapours descended into the valleys, and rain began to fall; at first slightly, but afterwards in heavy continuous showers. Melancholy was the aspect of the abbey, and it required no stretch of imagination to fancy that the old structure was deploring the fate of its former ruler. To those impressed with the idea — and many there were who were so — the very stones of the convent church seemed dissolving into tears. The statues of the saints appeared to weep, and the great statue of Saint Gregory de Northbury over the porch seemed bowed down with grief. The grotesquely carved heads on the spouts grinned horribly at the abbot's destroyers, and spouted forth cascades of water as if with the intent of drowning them. So deluging and incessant were the showers that it seemed, indeed, as if the abbey would be flooded. All the inequalities of ground within the great quadrangle of the cloisters looked like ponds, and the various water-spouts from the dormitory, the refectory, and the chapter-house, continuing to jet forth streams into the court below, the ambulatories were soon filled ankle-deep, and even the lower apartments, on which they opened, invaded.

Surcharged with moisture, the royal banner on the gate drooped and clung to the staff, as if it too shared in the general depression, or as if the sovereign authority it represented had given way. The countenances and deportment of the men harmonised with the weather; they moved about gloomily and despondently, their bright accoutrements sullied with the wet, and their buskins clogged with mire. A forlorn sight it was to watch the shivering sentinels on the walls; and yet more forlorn to see the groups of the abbot's old retainers gathering without, wrapped in their blue woollen cloaks, patiently enduring the drenching showers, and awaiting the last awful scene. But the saddest sight of all was on the hill, already described, called the Hole-houses. Here two other lesser gibbets had been erected during the night, one on either hand of the loftier instrument of justice, and the carpenters were yet employed in finishing their work, having been delayed by the badness of the weather. Half drowned by the torrents that fell upon them, the poor fellows were protected from interference with their disagreeable occupation by half-a-dozen well-mounted and well-armed troopers, and by as many halberdiers; and this company, completely exposed to the weather, suffered severely from wet and cold. The rain beat against the gallows, ran down its tall naked posts, and collected in pools at its feet. Attracted by some strange instinct, which seemed to give them a knowledge of the object of these terrible preparations, two ravens wheeled screaming round the fatal tree, and at length one of them settled on the cross beam, and could with difficulty be dislodged by the shouts of the men, when it flew away, croaking hoarsely. Up this gentle hill, ordinarily so soft and beautiful, but now abhorrent as a Golgotha, in the eyes of the beholders, groups of rustics and monks had climbed over ground rendered slippery with moisture, and had gathered round the paling encircling

the terrible apparatus, looking the images of despair and woe.

Even those within the abbey, and sheltered from the storm, shared the all-pervading despondency. The refectory looked dull and comfortless, and the logs on the hearth hissed and sputtered, and would not burn. Green wood had been brought instead of dry fuel by the drowsy henchman. The viands on the board provoked not the appetite, and the men emptied their cups of ale, yawned and stretched their arms, as if they would fain sleep an hour or two longer. The sense of discomfort was heightened by the entrance of those whose term of watch had been relieved, and who cast their dripping cloaks on the floor, while two or three savage dogs, steaming with moisture, stretched their huge lengths before the sullen fire, and disputed all approach to it.

Within the great hall were already gathered the retainers of the Earl of Derby, but the nobleman himself had not appeared. Having passed the greater part of the night in conference with one person or another, and the abbot's flight having caused him much disquietude, though he did not hear of it till the fugitive was recovered; the earl would not seek his couch until within an hour of daybreak, and his attendants, considering the state of the weather, and that it yet wanted full two hours to the time appointed for the execution, did not think it needful to disturb him. Braddyll and Assheton, however, were up and ready, but despite their firmness of nerve, they yielded like the rest to the depressing influence of the weather, and began to have some misgivings as to their own share in the tragedy about to be enacted. The various gentlemen in attendance paced to and fro within the hall, holding but slight converse together, anxiously counting the minutes, for the time appeared to pass on with unwonted slowness, and ever and anon glancing through the diamond

panes of the window at the rain pouring down steadily without, and coming back again hopeless of amendment in the weather.

If such were the disheartening influence of the day on those who had nothing to apprehend, what must its effect have been on the poor captives! Woeful indeed. The two monks suffered a complete prostration of spirit. All the resolution which Father Haydocke had displayed in his interview with the Earl of Derby failed him now, and he yielded to the agonies of despair. Father Eastgate was in little better condition, and gave vent to unavailing lamentations, instead of paying heed to the consolatory discourse of the monk who had been permitted to visit him.

The abbot was better sustained. Though greatly enfeebled by the occurrences of the night, yet in proportion as his bodily strength decreased, his mental energies rallied. Since the confession of his secret offence, and the conviction he had obtained that his supposed victim still lived, a weight seemed taken from his breast, and he had no longer any dread of death. Rather he looked to the speedy termination of existence with hopeful pleasure. He prepared himself as decently as the means afforded him permitted, for his last appearance before the world, but refused all refreshment except a cup of water, and being left to himself was praying fervently, when a man was admitted into his cell. Thinking it might be the executioner, come to summon him, he arose, and to his surprise beheld Hal o' Nabs. The countenance of the rustic was pale, but his bearing was determined.

"You here, my son," cried Paslew. "I hoped you had escaped."

"Ey'm i' nah dawnger, feayther abbut," replied Hal. "Ey'n getten leef to visit ye fo a minute only, so ey mun be brief. May yourself easy, ye shanna dee be 't hongmon's honds."

"How, my son!" cried Paslew. "I understand you not."

"Yo'n onderstond me weel enough by-an-by," replied Hal. "Dunnah be feart whon ye see me next; an comfort yoursel that whotever cums and goes, your death shall be avenged o' your warst foe."

Paslew would have sought some further explanation, but Hal stepped quickly backwards, and striking his foot against the door, it was instantly opened by the guard, and he went forth.

Not long after this, the Earl of Derby entered the great hall, and his first inquiry was as to the safety of the prisoners. When satisfied of this, he looked forth, and shuddered at the dismal state of the weather. While he was addressing some remarks on this subject, and on its interference with the tragical exhibition about to take place, an officer entered the hall, followed by several persons of inferior condition, amongst whom was Hal o' Nabs, and marched up to the earl, while the others remained standing at a respectful distance.

"What news do you bring me, Sir?" cried the earl, noticing the officer's evident uneasiness of manner. "Nothing hath happened to the prisoners? God's death! if it hath, you shall all answer for it with your bodies."

"Nothing hath happened to them, my lord," said the officer, — "but —"

"But what?" interrupted the earl. "Out with it quickly."

"The executioner from Lancaster and his two aids have fled," replied the officer.

"Fled!" exclaimed the earl, stamping his foot with rage; "now, as I live, this is a device to delay the execution till some new attempt at rescue can be made. But it shall fail, if I string up the abbot myself. Death! can no other hangmen be found? ha!"

"Of a surety, my lord; but all have an aversion to the office,

and hold it opprobrious, especially to put churchmen to death," replied the officer.

"Opprobrious or not, it must be done," replied the earl. "See that fitting persons are provided."

At this moment Hal o' Nabs stepped forward.

"Ey 'm willing to ondertake t' job, my lord, an' to hong t' abbut, without fee or rewort," he said.

"Thou bear'st him a grudge, I suppose, good fellow," replied the earl, laughing at the rustic's uncouth appearance; "but thou seem'st a stout fellow, and one not likely to flinch, and may discharge the office as well as another. If no better man can be found, let him do it," he added to the officer.

"Ey humbly thonk your lortship," replied Hal, inwardly rejoicing at the success of his scheme. But his countenance fell when he perceived Demdike advance from behind the others.

"This man is not to be trusted, my lord," said Demdike, coming forward; "he has some mischievous design in making the request. So far from bearing enmity to the abbot, it was he who assisted him in his attempt to escape last night."

"What!" exclaimed the earl, "is this a new trick? Bring the fellow forward that I may examine him."

But Hal was gone. Instantly divining Demdike's purpose, and seeing his chance lost, he mingled with the lookers-on, who covered his retreat. Nor could he be found when sought for by the guard.

"See you provide a substitute quickly, Sir," cried the earl, angrily, to the officer.

"It is needless to take further trouble, my lord," replied Demdike; "I am come to offer myself as executioner."

"Thou!" exclaimed the earl.

"Ay," replied the other. "When I heard that the men from Lancaster were fled, I instantly knew that some scheme

to frustrate the ends of justice was on foot, and I at once resolved to undertake the office myself rather than delay or risk should occur. What this man's aim was, who hath just offered himself, I partly guess, but it hath failed; and if your lordship will intrust the matter to me I will answer that no further impediment shall arise, but that the sentence shall be fully carried out, and the law satisfied. Your lordship can trust me."

"I know it," replied the earl. "Be it as you will. It is now on the stroke of nine. At ten let all be in readiness to set out for Wiswall Hall. The rain may have ceased by that time, but no weather must stay you. Go forth with the new executioner, Sir," he added to the officer, "and see all necessary preparations made."

And as Demdike bowed, and departed with the officer, the earl sat down with his retainers to break his fast.

CHAPTER IX.

Wiswall Hall.

SHORTLY before ten o'clock a numerous cortege, consisting of a troop of horse in their full equipments, a band of archers with their bows over their shoulders, and a long train of barefoot monks, who had been permitted to attend, set out from the abbey. Behind them came a varlet with a paper mitre on his head, and a lathen crosier in his hand, covered with a surcoat, on which was emblazoned, but torn and reversed, the arms of Paslew; argent, a fess between three mullets, sable, pierced of the field, a crescent for difference. After him came another varlet bearing a banner, on which was painted a grotesque figure in a half-military, half-monastic garb, representing the "Earl of Poverty" with this distich beneath it: —

Priest and warrior — rich and poor,
He shall be hanged at his own door.

Next followed a tumbrel, drawn by two horses, in which sat the abbot alone, the two other prisoners being kept back for the present. Then came Demdike, in a leathern jerkin and blood-red hose, fitting closely to his sinewy limbs, and wrapped in a houppeland of the same colour as the hose, with a coil of rope round his neck. He walked between two ill-favoured personages habited in black, whom he had chosen as assistants. A band of halberdiers brought up the rear. The procession moved slowly along; the passing-bell tolling each minute, and a muffled drum sounding hollowly at intervals.

Shortly before the procession started the rain ceased, but the air felt damp and chill, and the roads were inundated. Passing out at the north-eastern gateway, the gloomy train skirted the south side of the convent church, and went on in the direction of the village of Whalley. When near the east end of the holy edifice, the abbot beheld two coffins borne along, and, on inquiry, learnt that they contained the bodies of Bess Demdike and Cuthbert Ashbead, who were about to be interred in the cemetery. At this moment his eye for the first time encountered that of his implacable foe, and he then discovered that he was to serve as his executioner. At first Paslew felt much trouble at this thought, but the feeling quickly passed away. On reaching Whalley, every door was found closed, and every window shut; so that the spectacle was lost upon the inhabitants; and after a brief halt, the cavalcade set out for Wiswall Hall.

Sprung from an ancient family residing in the neighbourhood of Whalley, Abbot Paslew was the second son of Francis Paslew of Wiswall Hall, a great gloomy stone mansion, situated at the foot of the south-western side of Pendle Hill, where his brother Francis still resided. Of a cold and cautious character, Francis Paslew, second of the name, held aloof from the insurrection, and when his brother was arrested he wholly

abandoned him. Still the owner of Wiswall had not altogether escaped suspicion, and it was probably as much with the view of degrading him as of adding to the abbot's punishment, that the latter was taken to the hall on the morning of his execution. Be this as it may, the cortege toiled thither through roads bad in the best of seasons, but now, since the heavy rain, scarcely passable; and it arrived there in about half an hour, and drew up on the broad green lawn. Window and door of the hall were closed; no smoke issued from the heavy pile of chimneys; and to all outward seeming the place was utterly deserted. In answer to inquiries, it appeared that Francis Paslew had departed for Northumberland on the previous day, taking all his household with him.

In earlier years a quarrel having occurred between the haughty abbot and the churlish Francis, the brothers rarely met, whence it chanced that John Paslew had seldom visited the place of his birth of late, though lying so near to the abbey, and, indeed, forming part of its ancient dependencies. It was sad to view it now, and yet the house, gloomy as it was, recalled seasons with which, though they might awaken regret, no guilty associations were connected. Dark was the hall, and desolate, but on the fine old trees around it the rooks were settling, and their loud cawings pleased him, and excited gentle emotions. For a few moments he grew young again, and forgot why he was there. Fondly surveying the house, the terraced garden, in which, as a boy, he had so often strayed, and the park beyond it, where he had chased the deer; his gaze rose to the cloudy heights of Pendle, springing immediately behind the mansion, and up which he had frequently climbed. The flood-gates of memory were opened at once, and a whole tide of long-buried feelings rushed upon his heart.

From this half-painful, half-pleasurable retrospect he was

aroused by the loud blast of a trumpet, thrice blown. A recapitulation of his offences, together with his sentence, was read by a herald, after which the reversed blazonry was fastened upon the door of the hall, just below a stone escutcheon on which was carved the arms of the family; while the paper mitre was torn and trampled under foot, the lathen crosier broken in twain, and the scurril banner hacked in pieces.

While this degrading act was performed, a man in a miller's white garb, with the hood drawn over his face, forced his way towards the tumbrel, and while the attention of the guard was otherwise engaged, whispered in Paslew's ear,

"Ey han failed i' mey scheme, feayther abbut, boh rest assured ey'n avenge you. Demdike shan ha' mey Sheffield thwittle i' his heart'efore he 's a day older."

"The wizard has a charm against steel, my son, and indeed is proof against all weapons forged by men," replied Paslew, who recognised the voice of Hal o' Nabs, and hoped by this assertion to divert him from his purpose.

"Ha! say yo so, feayther abbut?" cried Hal. "Then ey'n reach him wi' summot sacred." And he disappeared.

At this moment, word was given to return, and in half-an-hour the cavalcade arrived at the abbey in the same order it had left it.

Though the rain had ceased, heavy clouds still hung overhead, threatening another deluge, and the aspect of the abbey remained gloomy as ever. The bell continued to toll; drums were beaten; and trumpets sounded from the outer and inner gateway, and from the three quadrangles. The cavalcade drew up in front of the great northern entrance; and its return being announced within, the two other captives were brought forth, each fastened upon a hurdle, harnessed to a stout horse. They looked dead already, so ghastly was the hue of their cheeks.

The abbot's turn came next. Another hurdle was brought forward, and Demdike advanced to the tumbrel. But Paslew recoiled from his touch, and sprang to the ground unaided. He was then laid on his back upon the hurdle, and his hands and feet were bound fast with ropes to the twisted timbers. While this painful task was roughly performed by the wizard's two ill-favoured assistants, the crowd of rustics, who looked on, murmured and exhibited such strong tokens of displeasure, that the guard thought it prudent to keep them off with their halberts. But when all was done, Demdike motioned to a man standing behind him, to advance, and the person who was wrapped in a russet cloak complied, drew forth an infant, and held it in such way that the abbot could see it. Paslew understood what was meant, but he uttered not a word. Demdike then knelt down beside him, as if ascertaining the security of the cords, and whispered in his ear: —

"Recall thy malediction, and my dagger shall save thee from the last indignity!"

"Never," replied Paslew; "the curse is irrevocable. But I would not recall it if I could. As I have said, thy child shall be a witch, and the mother of witches — but all shall be swept off — all!"

"Hell's torments seize thee!" cried the wizard, furiously.

"Nay, thou hast done thy worst to me," rejoined Paslew, meekly, "thou canst not harm me beyond the grave. Look to thyself, for even as thou speakest, thy child is taken from thee."

And so it was. While Demdike knelt beside Paslew, a hand was put forth, and, before the man who had custody of the infant could prevent it, his little charge was snatched from him. This the abbot saw, though the wizard perceived it not. The latter instantly sprang to his feet.

"Where is the child?" he demanded of the fellow in the russet cloak.

"It was taken from me by yon tall man who is disappearing through the gateway," replied the other, in great trepidation.

"Ha! *he* here!" exclaimed Demdike, regarding the dark figure with a look of despair. "It is gone from me for ever!"

"Ay, for ever!" echoed the abbot, solemnly.

"But revenge is still left me — revenge!" cried Demdike, with an infuriated gesture.

"Then glut thyself with it speedily," replied the abbot "for thy time here is short."

"I care not if it be," replied Demdike; "I shall live long enough if I survive thee."

CHAPTER X.

The Hole-houses.

At this moment the blast of a trumpet resounded from the gateway, and the Earl of Derby, with the sheriff on his right hand, and Assheton on the left, and mounted on a richly caparisoned charger, rode forth. He was preceded by four javelin-men, and followed by two heralds in their tabards.

To doleful tolling of bells — to solemn music — to plaintive hymn chanted by monks — to roll of muffled drum at intervals — the sad cortege set forth. Loud cries from the bystanders marked its departure, and some of them followed it, but many turned away, unable to endure the sight of horror about to ensue. Amongst those who went on was Hal o' Nabs, but he took care to keep out of the way of the guard, though he was little likely to be recognised, owing to his disguise.

Despite the miserable state of the weather, a great multitude was assembled at the place of execution, and they watched the approaching cavalcade with moody curiosity. To prevent

disturbance, arquebussiers were stationed in parties here and there, and a clear course for the cortege was preserved by two lines of halberdiers with crossed pikes. But notwithstanding this, much difficulty was experienced in mounting the hill. Rendered slippery by the wet, and yet more so by the trampling of the crowd, the road was so bad in places that the horses could scarcely drag the hurdles up it, and more than one delay occurred. The stoppages were always denounced by groans, yells, and hootings from the mob, and these, neither the menaces of the Earl of Derby, nor the active measures of the guard could repress.

At length, however, the cavalcade reached its destination. Then the crowd struggled forward, and settled into a dense compact ring round the circular railing enclosing the place of execution, within which were drawn up the Earl of Derby, the sheriff, Assheton, and the principal gentlemen, together with Demdike and his assistants; the guard forming a circle three deep round them.

Paslew was first unloosed, and when he stood up, he found Father Smith, the late prior, beside him, and tenderly embraced him.

"Be of good courage, Father Abbot," said the prior; "a few moments and you will be numbered with the just."

"My hope is in the infinite mercy of Heaven, father," replied Paslew, sighing deeply. "Pray for me at the last."

"Doubt it not," returned the prior, fervently. "I will pray for you now and ever."

Meanwhile, the bonds of the two other captives were unfastened, but they were found wholly unable to stand without support. A lofty ladder had been placed against the central scaffold, and up this Demdike having cast off his houppeland, mounted and adjusted the rope. His tall gaunt figure fully displayed in his tight-fitting red garb made him

look like a hideous scarecrow. His appearance was greeted by the mob with a perfect hurricane of indignant outcries and yells. But he heeded them not, but calmly pursued his task. Above him wheeled the two ravens, who had never quitted the place since daybreak, uttering their discordant cries. When all was done, he descended a few steps, and taking a black hood from his girdle to place over the head of his victim, called out in a voice which had little human in its tone, "I wait for you, John Paslew."

"Are you ready, Paslew?" demanded the Earl of Derby.

"I am, my lord," replied the abbot. And embracing the prior for the last time, he added, "*Vale, carissime frater, in æternum vale! et Dominus tecum sit in ultionem inimicorum nostrorum!*"

"It is the king's pleasure that you say not a word in your justification to the mob, Paslew," observed the earl.

"I had no such intention, my lord," replied the abbot.

"Then tarry no longer," said the earl; "if you need aid you shall have it."

"I require none," replied Paslew, resolutely.

With this he mounted the ladder, with as much firmness and dignity as if ascending the steps of a tribune.

Hitherto, nothing but yells and angry outcries had stunned the ears of the lookers-on, and several missives had been hurled at Demdike, some of which took effect, though without occasioning him discomfiture; but when the abbot appeared above the heads of the guard, the tumult instantly subsided, and profound silence ensued. Not a breath was drawn by the spectators. The ravens alone continued their ominous croaking.

Hal o' Nabs, who stood on the outskirts of the ring, saw thus far, but he could bear it no longer, and rushed down the hill. Just as he reached the level ground, a culverin was

fired from the gateway, and the next moment a loud wailing cry bursting from the mob told that the abbot was launched into eternity.

Hal would not look back, but went slowly on, and presently afterwards other horrid sounds dinned in his ears, telling that all was over with the two other sufferers. Sickened and faint, he leaned against a wall for support. How long he continued thus, he knew not, but he heard the cavalcade coming down the hill, and saw the Earl of Derby and his attendants ride past. Glancing towards the place of execution, Hal then perceived that the abbot had been cut down, and rousing himself he joined the crowd now rushing towards the gate, and ascertained that the body of Paslew was to be taken to the convent church, and deposited there till orders were to be given respecting its interment. He learnt, also, that the removal of the corpse was intrusted to Demdike. Fired by this intelligence, and suddenly conceiving a wild project of vengeance, founded upon what he had heard from the abbot of the wizard being proof against weapons forged by men, he hurried to the church, entered it, the door being thrown open, and rushing up to the gallery, contrived to get out through a window upon the top of the porch, where he secreted himself behind the great stone statue of Saint Gregory.

The information he had obtained proved correct. Ere long a mournful train approached the church, and a bier was set down before the porch. A black hood covered the face of the dead, but the vestments showed that it was the body of Paslew.

At the head of the bearers was Demdike, and when the body was set down he advanced towards it, and, removing the hood, gazed at the livid and distorted features.

"At length I am fully avenged," he said.

"And Abbot Paslew, also," cried a voice above him.

Demdike looked up, but the look was his last, for the ponderous statue of Saint Gregory de Northbury, launched from its pedestal, fell upon his head, and crushed him to the ground. A mangled and breathless mass was taken from beneath the image, and the hands and visage of Paslew were found spotted with blood dashed from the gory carcase. The author of the wizard's destruction was suspected, but never found, nor was it positively known who had done the deed till years after, when Hal o' Nabs, who meanwhile had married pretty Dorothy Croft, and had been blessed by numerous offspring in the union, made his last confession, and then he exhibited no remarkable or becoming penitence for the act, neither was he refused absolution.

Thus it came to pass that the abbot and his enemy perished together. The mutilated remains of the wizard were placed in a shell, and huddled into the grave where his wife had that morning been laid. But no prayer was said over him. And the superstitious believed that the body was carried off that very night by the Fiend, and taken to a witch's sabbath in the ruined tower on Rimington Moor. Certain it was, that the unhallowed grave was disturbed. The body of Paslew was decently interred in the north aisle of the parish church of Whalley, beneath a stone with a Gothic cross sculptured upon it, and bearing the piteous inscription: — "Miserere mei."

But in the belief of the vulgar the abbot did not rest tranquilly. For many years afterwards a white-robed monastic figure was seen to flit along the cloisters, pass out at the gate, and disappear with a wailing cry over the Hole-houses. And the same ghostly figure was often seen to glide through the corridor in the abbot's lodging, and vanish at the door of the chamber leading to the little oratory. Thus Whalley Abbey was supposed to be haunted, and few liked to wander

through its deserted cloisters, or ruined church after dark. The abbot's tragical end was thus recorded: —

Johannes Paslew: Capitale Affectus Supplicio.
12° Mensis Martii, 1537.

As to the infant upon whom the abbot's malediction fell, it was reserved for the dark destinies shadowed forth in the dread anathema he had uttered: to the development of which the tragic drama about to follow is devoted, and to which the fate of Abbot Paslew forms a necessary and fitting prologue. Thus far the veil of the Future may be drawn aside. That infant and her progeny became the LANCASHIRE WITCHES.

END OF THE INTRODUCTION.

THE LANCASHIRE WITCHES.

BOOK THE FIRST.

ALIZON DEVICE.

BOOK THE FIRST.

CHAPTER I.

The May Queen.

On a May Day, in the early part of the seventeenth century, and a most lovely May day, too, admirably adapted to usher in the merriest month of the year, and seemingly made expressly for the occasion, a wake was held at Whalley, to which all the neighbouring country folk resorted, and indeed many of the gentry as well, for in the good old times, when England was still Merry England, a wake had attraction for all classes alike, and especially in Lancashire; for, with pride I speak it, there were no lads, who in running, vaulting, wrestling, dancing, or in any other manly exercise, could compare with the Lancashire lads. In archery, above all, none could match them, for were not their ancestors the stout bowmen and billmen whose cloth-yard shafts, and trenchant weapons, won the day at Flodden? And were they not true sons of their fathers? And then, I speak it with yet greater pride, there were few, if any, lasses who could compare in comeliness with the rosy-cheeked, dark-haired, bright-eyed lasses of Lancashire.

Assemblages of this kind, therefore, where the best specimens of either sex were to be met with, were sure to be well attended, and in spite of an enactment passed in the preceding reign of Elizabeth, prohibiting "piping, playing, bear-baiting,

and bull-baiting on the Sabbath days, or on any other days, and also superstitious ringing of bells, wakes, and common feasts," they were not only not interfered with, but rather encouraged by the higher orders. Indeed, it was well known that the reigning monarch, James the First, inclined the other way, and, desirous of checking the growing spirit of Puritanism throughout the kingdom, had openly expressed himself in favour of honest recreation after evening prayers and upon holidays; and, furthermore, had declared that he liked well the spirit of his good subjects in Lancashire, and would not see them punished for indulging in lawful exercises, but that ere long he would pay them a visit in one of his progresses, and judge for himself, and if he found all things as they had been represented to him, he would grant them still further licence. Meanwhile, this expression of the royal opinion removed every restriction, and old sports and pastimes, May games, Whitsun-ales, and morris-dances, with rush-bearings, bell-ringings, wakes, and feasts, were as much practised as before the passing of the obnoxious enactment of Elizabeth. The Puritans and Precisians discountenanced them, it is true, as much as ever, and would have put them down if they could, as savouring of papistry and idolatry, and some rigid divines thundered against them from the pulpit; but with the king and the authorities in their favour, the people little heeded these denunciations against them, and abstained not from any "honest recreation" whenever a holiday occurred.

If Lancashire was famous for wakes, the wakes of Whalley were famous even in Lancashire. The men of the district were in general a hardy, handsome race, of the genuine Saxon breed, and passionately fond of all kinds of pastime, and the women had their full share of the beauty indigenous to the soil. Besides, it was a secluded spot, in the heart of a wild

mountainous region, and though occasionally visited by travellers journeying northward, or by others coming from the opposite direction, retained a primitive simplicity of manners, and a great partiality for old customs and habits.

The natural beauties of the place, contrasted with the dreary region around it, and heightened by the picturesque ruins of the ancient abbey, part of which, namely, the old abbot's lodgings, had been converted into a residence by the Asshetons, and was now occupied by Sir Ralph Assheton, while the other was left to the ravages of time, made it always an object of attraction to those residing near it; but when on the May Day in question, there was not only to be a wake, but a may-pole set on the green, and a rush-bearing with morris-dancers besides, together with Whitsun-ale at the Abbey, crowds flocked to Whalley from Wiswall, Cold Coates, and Clithero, from Ribchester and Blackburn, from Padiham and Pendle, and even from places more remote. Not only was John Lawe's of the Dragon full, but the Chequers, and the Swan also, and the roadside ale-house to boot. Sir Ralph Assheton had several guests at the Abbey, and others were expected in the course of the day, while Doctor Ormerod had friends staying with him at the vicarage.

Soon after midnight, on the morning of the festival, many young persons of the village, of both sexes, had arisen, and, to the sound of horn, had repaired to the neighbouring woods, and there gathered a vast stock of green boughs and flowering branches of the sweetly-perfumed hawthorn, wild roses, and honeysuckle, with baskets of violets, cowslips, primroses, blue-bells, and other wild flowers, and returning in the same order they went forth, fashioned the branches into green bowers within the church-yard, or round about the may-pole, set up on the green, and decorated them afterwards with garlands and crowns of flowers. This morning ceremonial

ought to have been performed without wetting the feet; but, though some pains were taken in the matter, few could achieve the difficult task, except those carried over the dewy grass by their lusty swains. On the day before the rushes had been gathered, and the rush-cart piled, shaped, trimmed, and adorned by those experienced in the task, (and it was one requiring both taste and skill, as will be seen when the cart itself shall come forth,) while others had borrowed for its adornment, from the abbey and elsewhere, silver tankards, drinking cups, spoons, ladles, brooches, watches, chains, and bracelets, so as to make an imposing show.

Day was ushered in by a merry peal of bells from the tower of the old parish church, and the ringers practised all kinds of joyous changes during the morning, and fired many a clanging volley. The whole village was early astir; and as these were times when good hours were kept; and as early rising is a famous sharpener of the appetite, especially when attended with exercise, so an hour before noon the rustics one and all sat down to dinner, the strangers being entertained by their friends, and if they had no friends, throwing themselves upon the general hospitality. The ale-houses were reserved for tippling at a later hour, for it was then customary for both gentleman and commoner, male as well as female, as will be more fully shown hereafter, to take their meals at home, and repair afterwards to houses of public entertainment for wine or other liquors. Private chambers were, of course, reserved for the gentry; but not unfrequently the squire and his friends would take their bottle with the other guests. Such was the invariable practice in the northern counties in the reign of James the First.

Soon after mid day, and when the bells began to peal merrily again (for even ringers must recruit themselves), at a small cottage in the outskirts of the village, and close to the

Calder, whose waters swept past the trimly kept garden attached to it, two young girls were employed in attiring a third, who was to represent Maid Marian, or Queen of May, in the pageant then about to ensue. And, certainly, by sovereign and prescriptive right of beauty, no one better deserved the high title and distinction conferred upon her than this fair girl. Lovelier maiden in the whole county, and however high her degree, than this rustic damsel, it was impossible to find; and though the becoming and fanciful costume in which she was decked could not heighten her natural charms, it certainly displayed them to advantage. Upon her smooth and beautiful brow sat a gilt crown, while her dark and luxuriant hair, covered behind with a scarlet coif, embroidered with gold, and tied with yellow, white, and crimson ribands, but otherwise wholly unconfined, swept down almost to the ground. Slight and fragile, her figure was of such just proportion that every movement and gesture had an indescribable charm. The most courtly dame might have envied her fine and taper fingers, and fancied she could improve them by protecting them against the sun, or by rendering them snowy white with paste or cosmetic, but this was questionable: nothing certainly could improve the small foot and finely turned ankle, so well displayed in the red hose and smart little yellow buskin, fringed with gold. A stomacher of scarlet cloth, braided with yellow lace in cross bars, confined her slender waist. Her robe was of carnation-coloured silk, with wide sleeves, and the gold-fringed skirt descended only a little below the knee, like the dress of a modern Swiss peasant, so as to reveal the exquisite symmetry of her limbs. Over all she wore a surcoat of azure silk, lined with white and edged with gold. In her left hand she held a red pink as an emblem of the season. So enchanting was her appearance altogether, so fresh the character of her beauty, so bright the bloom that dyed her lovely

cheeks, that she might have been taken for a personification of May herself. She was indeed in the very May of life — the mingling of spring and summer in womanhood; and the tender blue eyes, bright and clear as diamonds of purest water, the soft regular features, and the merry mouth, whose ruddy parted lips, ever and anon displayed two rows of pearls, completed the similitude to the attributes of the jocund month.

Her handmaidens, both of whom were simple girls, and though not destitute of some pretensions to beauty themselves, in nowise to be compared with her, were at the moment employed in knotting the ribands in her hair, and adjusting the azure surcoat.

Attentively watching these proceedings sat on a stool, placed in a corner, a little girl, some nine or tén years old, with a basket of flowers on her knee. The child was very diminutive, even for her age, and her smallness was increased by personal deformity, occasioned by contraction of the chest, and spinal curviture, which raised her back above her shoulders; but her features were sharp and cunning, indeed almost malignant, and there was a singular and unpleasant look about the eyes, which were not placed evenly in the head. Altogether she had a strange old-fashioned look, and from her habitual bitterness of speech, as well as from her vindictive character, which, young as she was, had been displayed, with some effect, on more than one occasion, she was no great favourite with any one. It was curious now to watch the eager and envious interest she took in the progress of her sister's adornment — for such was the degree of relationship in which she stood to the May Queen — and when the surcoat was finally adjusted, and the last riband tied, she broke forth, having hitherto preserved a sullen silence.

"Weel, sister Alizon, ye may a farrently May Queen, ey mun say," she observed, spitefully, "but to my mind other

Suky Worseley or Nancy Holt, here, would ha' look'd prottier."

"Nah, nah, that we shouldna," rejoined one of the damsels referred to; "there is na a lass i' Lankyshiar to hold a condle near Alizon Device."

"Fie upon ye, for an ill-favort minx, Jennet," cried Nancy Holt; "yo 're jealous o' your protty sister."

"Ey jealous," cried Jennet, reddening, "an whoy the firrups should ey be jealous, ey, thou saucy jade! Whon ey grow older ey'st may a prottier May Queen than onny on you, and so the lads aw tell me."

"And so you will, Jennet," said Alizon Device, checking, by a gentle look, the jeering laugh in which Nancy seemed disposed to indulge, — "so you will, my pretty little sister," she added, kissing her; "and I will 'tire you as well and as carefully as Susan and Nancy have just 'tired me."

"Mayhap ey shanna live till then," rejoined Jennet, peevishly, "and when ey 'm dead an' gone, an' laid i't' cowld church-yard, yo an they win be sorry fo having werreted me so."

"I have never intentionally vexed you, Jennet, love," said Alizon, "and I am sure these two girls love you dearly."

"Eigh, we may allowance fo her feaw tempers," observed Susan Worseley; "fo we knoa that ailments an deformities are sure to may folk fretful."

"Eigh, there it is," cried Jennet, sharply. "My high shoulthers an sma size are always thrown i' my feace. Boh ey'st grow tall i' time, an get straight, — eigh straighter than yo, Suky, wi your broad back an short neck, — boh if ey dunna, whot matters it? Ey shall be feared at onny rate — ay, feared, wenches, by ye both."

"Nah doubt on't, theaw little good-fo'-nothin piece o' mischief," muttered Susan.

"Whot 's that yo sayn, Suky?" cried Jennet, whose quick ears had caught the words. "Tak care whot ye do to offend me, lass," she added, shaking her thin fingers armed with talon-like claws threateningly at her, "or ey 'll ask my granddame, Mother Demdike, to quieten ye."

At the mention of this name a sudden shade came over Susan's countenance. Changing colour and slightly trembling, she turned away from the child, who, noticing the effect of her threat, could not repress her triumph. But again Alizon interposed.

"Do not be alarmed, Susan," she said, "my grandmother will never harm you, I am sure; indeed, she will never harm any one; and do not heed what little Jennet says, for she is not aware of the effect of her own words, or of the injury they might do our grandmother, if repeated."

"Ey dunna wish to repeat them, or to think of em," sobbed Susan.

"That 's good, that 's kind of you, Susan," replied Alizon, taking her hand. "Do not be cross any more, Jennet. You see you have made her weep."

"Ey 'm glad on it," rejoined the little girl, laughing; "let her cry on. It 'll do her good, an teach her to mend her manners, and nah offend me again."

"Ey didna mean to offend ye, Jennet," sobbed Susan, "boh yo 're so wrythen an marr'd, a body canna speak to please ye."

"Weel, if ye confess your fault, ey 'm satisfied," replied the little girl; "boh let it be a lesson to ye, Suky, to keep guard o' your tongue i' future."

"It shall, ey promise ye," replied Susan, drying her eyes.

At this moment a door opened, and a woman entered from an inner room, having a high-crowned, conical-shaped hat on her head, and broad white pinners over her cheeks. Her

dress was of dark red camlet, with high-heeled shoes. She stooped slightly, and being rather lame, supported herself on a crutch-handled stick. In age she might be between forty and fifty, but she looked much older, and her features were not at all prepossessing from a hooked nose and chin, while their sinister effect was increased by a formation of the eyes similar to that in Jennet, only more strongly noticeable in her case. This woman was Elizabeth Device, widow of John Device, about whose death there was a mystery to be inquired into hereafter, and mother of Alizon and Jennet, though how she came to have a daughter so unlike herself in all respects as the former, no one could conceive; but so it was.

"Soh, ye ha donned your finery at last, Alizon," said Elizabeth. "Your brother Jem has just run up to say that t' rush-cart has set out, and that Robin Hood an his merry men are comin' for their Queen."

"And their Queen is quite ready for them," replied Alizon, moving towards the door.

"Neigh, let 's ha' a look at ye fust, wench," cried Elizabeth, staying her; "fine fitthers may fine brids — ey warrant me now yo'n getten these May gew-gaws on, yo fancy yourself a queen in arnest."

"A queen of a day, mother, — a queen of a little village festival, — nothing more," replied Alizon. "Oh, if I were a queen in right earnest, or even a great lady —"

"Whot would yo do?" demanded Elizabeth Device, sourly.

"I 'd make you rich, mother, and build you a grand house to live in," replied Alizon, "much grander than Browsholme, or Downham, or Middleton."

"Pity yo 're nah a queen, then, Alizon," replied Elizabeth, relaxing her harsh features into a wintry smile.

"Whot would ye do fo me, Alizon, if ye were a queen?" asked little Jennet, looking up at her.

"Why, let me see," was the reply; "I 'd indulge every one of your whims and wishes. You should only need ask to have."

"Poh — poh — yo 'd never content her," observed Elizabeth, testily.

"It 's nah your way to try an content me, mother, even whon ye might," rejoined Jennet, who, if she loved few people, loved her mother least of all, and never lost an opportunity of testifying her dislike to her.

"Awt o'pontee, little wasp," cried her mother; "theaw desarves nowt boh whot theaw dustna get often enough — a good whipping."

"Yo hanna towd us whot yo 'd do fo yurself if yo war a great lady, Alizon?" interposed Susan.

"Oh, I haven't thought about myself," replied the other, laughing.

"Ey con tell ye what she 'd do, Suky," replied little Jennet, knowingly; "she 'd marry Master Richard Assheton, o' Middleton."

"Jennet!" exclaimed Alizon, blushing crimson.

"It 's true," replied the little girl, "ye knoa ye would, Alizon. Look at her feace," she added, with a screaming laugh.

"Howd te tongue, little plague," cried Elizabeth, rapping her knuckles with her stick, "and behave thyself, or theaw shanna go out to t' wake."

Jennet dealt her mother a bitterly vindictive look, but she neither uttered cry, nor made remark.

In the momentary silence that ensued the blithe jingling of bells was heard, accompanied by the merry sound of tabor and pipe.

"Ah! here come the rush-cart and the morris-dancers," cried Alizon, rushing joyously to the window, which being

left partly open admitted the scent of the woodbine and eglantine by which it was overgrown, as well as the humming sound of the bees by which the flowers were invaded.

Almost immediately afterwards a frolic troop, like a band of masquers, approached the cottage, and drew up before it, while the jingling of bells ceasing at the same moment, told that the rush-cart had stopped likewise. Chief amongst the party was Robin Hood, clad in a suit of Lincoln green, with a sheaf of arrows at his back, a bugle dangling from his baldric, a bow in his hand, and a broad-leaved green hat on his head, looped up on one side, and decorated with a heron's feather. The hero of Sherwood was personated by a tall, well-limbed fellow, to whom, being really a forester of Bowland, the character was natural. Beside him stood a very different figure, a jovial friar, with shaven crown, rubicund cheeks, bull throat, and mighty paunch, covered by a russet habit, and girded in by a red cord, decorated with golden twist and tassel. He wore red hose and sandal shoon, and carried in his girdle a wallet, to contain a roast capon, a neat's tongue, or any other dainty given him. Friar Tuck, for such he was, found his representative in Ned Huddlestone, porter at the abbey, who, as the largest and stoutest man in the village, was chosen on that account to the part. Next to him came a character of no little importance, and upon whom much of the mirth of the pageant depended, and this devolved upon the village cobbler, Jack Roby, a dapper little fellow, who fitted the part of the Fool to a nicety. With bauble in hand, and blue coxcomb hood adorned with long white asses' ears on head, with jerkin of green, striped with yellow; hose of different colours, the left leg being yellow, with a red pantoufle, and the right blue, terminated with a yellow shoe; with bells hung upon various parts of his motley attire, so that he could not move without producing a jingling sound, Jack

Roby looked wonderful indeed; and was constantly dancing about, and dealing a blow with his bauble. Next came Will Scarlet, Stukeley, and Little John, all proper men and tall, attired in Lincoln green, like Robin Hood, and similarly equipped. Like him, too, they were all foresters of Bowland,' owning service to the bow-bearer, Mr. Parker, of Browsholme Hall, and the representative of Little John, who was six feet and a half high, and stout in proportion, was Lawrence Blackrod, Mr. Parker's head keeper. After the foresters came Tom the Piper, a wandering minstrel, habited for the occasion, in a blue doublet, with sleeves of the same colour, turned up with yellow, red hose, and brown buskins, red bonnet, and green surcoat lined with yellow. Beside the piper was another minstrel, similarly attired, and provided with a tabor. Lastly came one of the main features of the pageant, and which, together with the Fool, contributed most materially to the amusement of the spectators. This was the Hobby Horse. The hue of this spirited charger was a pinkish white, and his housings were of crimson cloth hanging to the ground, so as to conceal the rider's real legs, though a pair of sham ones dangled at the side. His bit was of gold, and his bridle red morocco leather, while his rider was very sumptuously arrayed in a purple mantle, bordered with gold, with a rich cap of the same regal hue on his head, encircled with gold, and having a red feather stuck in it. The hobby-horse had a plume of nodding feathers on his head, and careered from side to side, now rearing in front, now kicking behind, now prancing, now gently ambling, and in short indulging in playful fancies and vagaries, such as horse never indulged in before, to the imminent danger, it seemed, of his rider, and to the huge delight of the beholders. Nor must it be omitted, as it was matter of great wonderment to the lookers-on, that by some legerdemain contrivance the rider

of the hobby-horse had a couple of daggers stuck in his cheeks, while from his steed's bridle hung a silver ladle, which he held now and then to the crowd, and in which, when he did so, a few coins were sure to rattle. After the hobby-horse came the May-pole, not the tall pole so called and which was already planted in the green, but a stout staff elevated some six feet above the head of the bearer, with a coronal of flowers atop, and four long garlands hanging down, each held by a morris-dancer. Then came the May Queen's gentleman-usher, a fantastic personage in habiliments of blue guarded with white, and holding a long willow wand in his hand. After the usher came the main troop of morris-dancers — the men attired in a graceful costume, which set off their light active figures to advantage, consisting of a slashed jerkin of black and white velvet with cut sleeves left open so as to reveal the snowy shirt beneath, white hose, and shoes of black Spanish leather with large roses. Ribands were everywhere in their dresses — ribands and tinsel adorned their caps, ribands crossed their hose, and ribands were tied round their arms. In either hand they held a long white handkerchief knotted with ribands. The female morris-dancers were habited in white, decorated like the dresses of the men; they had ribands and wreaths of flowers round their heads, bows in their hair, and in their hands long white knotted kerchiefs.

In the rear of the performers in the pageant came the rush-cart drawn by a team of eight stout horses, with their manes and tails tied with ribands, their collars fringed with red and yellow worsted, and hung with bells, which jingled blithely at every movement, and their heads decked with flowers. The cart itself consisted of an enormous pile of rushes, banded and twisted together, rising to a considerable height, and terminated in a sharp ridge, like the point of a

Gothic window. The sides and top were decorated with flowers and ribands, and there were eaves in front and at the back, and on the space within them, which was covered with white paper, were strings of gaudy flowers, embedded in moss, amongst which were suspended all the ornaments and finery that could be collected for the occasion: to wit, flagons of silver, spoons, ladles, chains, watches, and bracelets, so as to make a brave and resplendent show. The wonder was how articles of so much value would be trusted forth on such an occasion; but nothing was ever lost. On the top of the rush-cart, and bestriding its sharp ridges, sat half a dozen men, habited somewhat like the morris-dancers, in garments bedecked with tinsel and ribands, holding garlands formed by hoops, decorated with flowers, and attached to poles ornamented with silver paper, cut into various figures and devices, and diminishing gradually in size as they rose to a point, where they were crowned with wreaths of daffodils.

A large crowd of rustics, of all ages, accompanied the morris-dancers and rush-cart.

This gay troop having come to a halt, as described, before the cottage, the gentleman-usher entered it, and tapping against the inner door with his wand, took off his cap as soon as it was opened, and bowing deferentially to the ground, said he was come to invite the Queen of May, to join the pageant, and that it only awaited her presence to proceed to the green. Having delivered this speech in as good set phrase as he could command, and being the parish clerk and schoolmaster to boot, Sampson Harrop, by name, he was somewhat more polished than the rest of the hinds; and having, moreover, received a gracious response from the May Queen, who condescendingly replied that she was quite ready to accompany him, he took her hand, and led her ceremoniously to the door, whither they were followed by the others.

Loud was the shout that greeted Alizon's appearance, and tremendous was the pushing to obtain a sight of her; and so much was she abashed by the enthusiastic greeting, which was wholly unexpected on her part, that she would have drawn back again, if it had been possible; but the usher led her forward, and Robin Hood and the foresters having bent the knee before her, the hobby-horse began to curvet anew among the spectators, and tread on their toes, the fool to rap their knuckles with his bauble, the piper to play, the taborer to beat his tambourine, and the morris-dancers to toss their kerchiefs over their heads. Thus the pageant being put in motion, the rush-cart began to roll on, its horses' bells jingling merrily, and the spectators cheering lustily.

CHAPTER II.

The black cat and the white dove.

LITTLE Jennet watched her sister's triumphant departure with a look in which there was far more of envy than sympathy, and when her mother took her hand to lead her forth she would not go, but saying she did not care for any such idle sights, went back sullenly to the inner room. When there, however, she could not help peeping through the window, and saw Susan and Nancy join the revel rout, with feelings of increased bitterness.

"Ey wish it would rain an spile their finery," she said, sitting down on her stool, and plucking the flowers from her basket in pieces. "An yet, why canna ey enjoy such seets like other folk? Truth is, ey've nah heart for it."

"Folks say," she continued, after a pause, "that grandmother Demdike is a witch, an con do os she pleases. Ey wonder if she made Alizon so protty. Nah, that canna be, fo' Alizon 's na favourite o' hern. If she loves onny one it 's me.

Why dunna she make me good-looking, then? They say it 's sinfu' to be a witch — if so, how cums grandmother Demdike to be one? Boh ey'n observed that those folk os caws her witch are afeard on her, so it may be pure spite o' their pert."

As she thus mused, a great black cat belonging to her mother, which had followed her into the room, rubbed himself against her, putting up his back, and purring loudly.

"Ah, Tib," said the little girl, "how are ye, Tib? Ey didna knoa ye were here. Lemme ask ye some questions, Tib?"

The cat mewed, looked up, and fixed his great, yellow eyes upon her.

"One 'ud think ye onderstud whot wos said to ye Tib," pursued little Jennet. "We'n see whot ye say to this! Shan ey ever be Queen o' May, like sister Alizon?"

The cat mewed in a manner that the little girl found no difficulty in interpreting the reply into "No."

"How 's that, Tib?" cried Jennet, sharply. "If ey thought ye meant it, ey'd beat ye, sirrah. Answer me another question, ye saucy knave. Who will be luckiest, Alizon or me?"

This time the cat darted away from her, and made two or three skirmishes round the room, as if gone suddenly mad.

"Ey con may nowt o' that," observed Jennet, laughing.

All at once the cat bounded upon the chimney board, over which was placed a sampler, worked with the name "ALIZON."

"Why Tib really seems to onderstond me, ey declare," observed Jennet, uneasily. "Ey should like to ask him a few more questions, if ey durst," she added, regarding with some distrust the animal, who now returned, and began rubbing against her as before. "Tib — Tib!"

The cat looked up, and meved.

"Protty Tib — sweet Tib," continued the little girl, coaxingly. "Whot mun one do to be a witch like grandmother Demdike?"

The cat again dashed twice or thrice madly round the room, and then stopping suddenly at the hearth, sprang up the chimney.

"Ey'n frightened ye away ot onny rate," observed Jennet, laughing. "And yet it may mean summot," she added, reflecting a little, "fo ey'n heerd say os how witches fly up chimleys o' broomsticks to attend their sabbaths. Ey should like to fly i' that manner, an change myself into another shape — onny shape boh my own. Oh that ey could be os protty os Alizon! Ey dunna knoa whot ey'd nah do to be like her!"

Again the great black cat was beside her, rubbing against her, and purring. The child was a good deal startled, for she had not seen him return, and the door was shut, though he might have come in through the open window, only she had been looking that way all the time, and had never noticed him. Strange!

"Tib," said the child, patting him, "thou hasna answered my last question — how is one to become a witch?"

As she made this inquiry the cat suddenly scratched her in the arm, so that the blood came. The little girl was a good deal frightened, as well as hurt, and withdrawing her arm quickly, made a motion of striking the animal. But starting backwards, erecting his tail, and spitting, the cat assumed such a formidable appearance, that she did not dare to touch him, and she then perceived that some drops of blood stained her white sleeve giving the spots a certain resemblance to the letters J. and D., her own initials.

At this moment, when she was about to scream for help, though she knew no one was in the house, all having gone away with the May-day revellers a small white dove flew in at

the open window, and skimming round the room, alighted near her. No sooner had the cat caught sight of this beautiful bird, than instead of preparing to pounce upon it, as might have been expected, he instantly abandoned his fierce attitude, and uttering a sort of howl, sprang up the chimney as before. But the child scarcely observed this, her attention being directed towards the bird, whose extreme beauty delighted her. It seemed quite tame too, and allowed itself to be touched, and even drawn towards her, without an effort to escape. Never, surely, was seen so beautiful a bird — with such milk white feathers, such red legs, and such pretty yellow eyes, with crimson circles round them! So thought the little girl, as she gazed at it, and pressed it to her bosom. In doing this, gentle and good thoughts came upon her, and she reflected what a nice present this pretty bird would make to her sister Alizon on her return from the merry-making, and how pleased she should feel to give it to her. And then she thought of Alizon's constant kindness to her, and half reproached herself with the poor return she made for it, wondering she could entertain any feelings of envy towards one so good and amiable. All this while the dove nestled in her bosom.

While thus pondering, the little girl felt an unaccountable drowsiness steal over her, and presently afterwards dropped asleep, when she had a very strange dream. It seemed to her that there was a contest going on between two spirits, a good one and a bad, — the bad one being represented by the great black cat, and the good spirit by the white dove. What they were striving about she could not exactly tell, but she felt that the conflict had some relation to herself. The dove at first appeared to have but a poor chance against the claws of its sable adversary, but the sharp talons of the latter made no impression upon the white plumage of the bird, which now

shone like silver armour, and in the end the cat fled, yelling as it darted off — "Thou art victorious now, but her soul shall yet be mine."

Something awakened the little sleeper at the same moment, and she felt very much terrified at her dream, as she could not help thinking her own soul might be the one in jeopardy, and her first impulse was to see whether the white dove was safe. Yes, there it was still nestling in her bosom, with its head under its wing.

Just then she was startled at hearing her own name pronounced by a hoarse voice, and looking up she beheld a tall young man standing at the window. He had a somewhat gipsy look, having a dark olive complexion, and fine black eyes, though set strangely in his head, like those of Jennet and her mother, coal black hair, and very prominent features, of a sullen and almost savage cast. His figure was gaunt but very muscular, his arms being extremely long, and his hands unusually large and bony — personal advantages which made him a formidable antagonist in any rustic encounter, and in such he was frequently engaged, being of a very irascible temper, and turbulent disposition. He was clad in a holiday suit of dark green serge, which fitted him well, and carried a nosegay in one hand and a stout blackthorn cudgel in the other. This young man was James Device, son of Elizabeth, and some four or five years older than Alizon. He did not live with his mother in Whalley, but in Pendle Forest, near his old relative, Mother Demdike, and had come over that morning to attend the wake.

"Whot are ye abowt, Jennet?" inquired James Device, in tones naturally hoarse and deep, and which he took as little pains to soften, as he did to polish his manners, which were more than ordinarily rude and churlish.

"Whot are ye abowt, ey sey, wench?" he repeated,

"Why dunna ye go to t' green to see the morris-dancers foot it round t' May-pow? Cum along wi' me."

"Ey dunna want to go, Jem," replied the little girl.

"Boh yo shan go, ey tell ye," rejoined her brother; "ye shan see your sister dawnce. Ye con sit a whoam onny day; boh May Day cums ony wonst a year, an Alizon winna be Queen twice i' her life. Soh cum along wi' me, dereckly, or ey'n may ye."

"Ey should like to see Alizon dance, an so ey win go wi' ye, Jem," replied Jennet, getting up, "otherwise your orders shouldna may me stir, ey con tell ye."

As she came out, she found her brother whistling the blithe air of "Green Sleeves," cutting strange capers, in imitation of the morris-dancers, and whirling his cudgel over his head instead of a kerchief. The gaiety of the day seemed infectious, and to have seized even him. People stared to see Black Jem, or Surly Jem, as he was indifferently called, so joyous, and wondered what it could mean. He then fell to singing a snatch of a local ballad at that time in vogue in the neighbourhood: —

"If thou wi' nah my secret tell,
Ne bruit abroad i' Whalley parish,
An swear to keep my counsel well,
Ey win declare my day of marriage."

"Cum along, lass," he cried, stopping suddenly in his song, and snatching his sister's hand. "What han ye getten there, lapped up i' your kirtle, eh?"

"A white dove," replied Jennet, determined not to tell him any thing about her strange dream.

"A white dove!" echoed Jem. "Gi' it me, an ey'n wring its neck, an get it roasted for supper."

"Ye shan do nah such thing, Jem," replied Jennet. "Ey mean to gi' it to Alizon."

"Weel, weel, that 's reet," rejoined Jem, blandly, "it 'll may a pretty offering. Let 's look at it."

"Nah, nah," said Jennet, pressing the bird gently to her bosom, "neaw one shan see it efore Alizon."

"Cum along then," cried Jem, rather testily, and mending his pace, "or we'st be too late fo' t' round. Whoy yo'n scratted yourself," he added, noticing the red spots on her sleeve.

"Han ey?" she rejoined, evasively. "Oh now ey rekilect it wos Tib did it."

"Tib!" echoed Jem, gravely, and glancing uneasily at the marks.

Meanwhile, on quitting the cottage, the May Day revellers had proceeded slowly towards the green, increasing the number of their followers at each little tenement they passed and being welcomed everywhere with shouts and cheers. The hobby-horse curvetted and capered; the Fool fleered at the girls, and flouted the men, jesting with every one, and when failing in a point rapping the knuckles of his auditors; Friar Tuck chucked the pretty girls under the chin, in defiance of their sweethearts, and stole a kiss from every buxom dame that stood in his way, and then snapped his fingers, or made a broad grimace at the husband; the piper played, and the taborer rattled his tambourine; the morris-dancers tossed their kerchiefs aloft; and the bells of the rush-cart jingled merrily; the men on the top being on a level with the roofs of the cottages, and the summits of the hay-stacks they passed, but in spite of their exalted position jesting with the crowd below. But in spite of these multiplied attractions, and in spite of the gambols of Fool and Horse, though the latter elicited prodigious laughter, the main attention was fixed on the May Queen, who tripped lightly along by the side of her

faithful squire, Robin Hood, followed by the three bold foresters of Sherwood, and her usher.

In this way they reached the green, where already a large crowd was collected to see them, and where in the midst of it, and above the heads of the assemblage, rose the lofty May-pole, with all its flowery garlands glittering in the sunshine, and its ribands fluttering in the breeze. Pleasant was it to see those cheerful groups, composed of happy rustics, youths in their holiday attire, and maidens neatly habited too, and fresh and bright as the day itself. Summer sunshine sparkled in their eyes, and weather and circumstance as well as genial natures disposed them to enjoyment. Every lass above eighteen had her sweetheart, and old couples nodded and smiled at each other when any tender speech, broadly conveyed but tenderly conceived, reached their ears, and said it recalled the days of their youth. Pleasant was it to hear such honest laughter, and such good homely jests.

Laugh on, my merry lads, you are made of good old English stuff, loyal to church and king, and while you, and such as you, last, our land will be in no danger from foreign foe! Laugh on, and praise your sweethearts how you will. Laugh on, and blessings on your honest hearts!

The frolic train had just reached the precincts of the green, when the usher waving his wand aloft, called a momentary halt, announcing that Sir Ralph Assheton and the gentry were coming forth from the Abbey gate to meet them.

CHAPTER III.

The Asshetons.

BETWEEN Sir Ralph Assheton of the Abbey and the inhabitants of Whalley, many of whom were his tenants, he being joint lord of the manor with John Braddyll of Portfield, the best possible feeling subsisted; for though somewhat austere in manner, and tinctured with Puritanism, the worthy knight was sufficiently shrewd, or more correctly speaking, sufficiently liberal-minded, to be tolerant of the opinions of others, and being moreover sincere in his own religious views, no man could call him in question for them; besides which, he was very hospitable to his friends, very bountiful to the poor, a good landlord, and a humane man. His very austerity of manner, tempered by stately courtesy, added to the respect he inspired, especially as he could now and then relax into gaiety, and, when he did so, his smile was accounted singularly sweet. But in general he was grave and formal; stiff in attire, and stiff in gait; cold and punctilious in manner, precise in speech, and exacting in due respect from both high and low, which was seldom, if ever, refused him. Amongst Sir Ralph's other good qualities, for such it was esteemed by his friends and retainers, and they were, of course, the best judges, was a strong love of the chase, and perhaps he indulged a little too freely in the sports of the field, for a gentleman of a character so staid and decorous; but his popularity was far from being diminished by the circumstance; neither did he suffer the rude and boisterous companionship into which he was brought by indulgence in this his favourite pursuit in any way to affect him. Though still young, Sir Ralph was prematurely gray, and this combined with the sad severity of his aspect, gave him the air of

one considerably past the middle term of life, though this appearance was contradicted again by the youthful fire of his eagle eye. His features were handsome and strongly marked, and he wore a pointed beard and moustaches, with a shaved cheek. Sir Ralph Assheton had married twice, his first wife being a daughter of Sir James Bellingham, of Levens, in Northumberland, by whom he had two children; while his second choice fell upon Eleanor Shuttleworth, the lovely and well-endowed heiress of Gawthorpe, to whom he had been recently united. In his attire, even when habited for the chase or a merry-making, like the present, the Knight of Whalley affected a sombre colour, and ordinarily wore a quilted doublet of black silk, immense trunk hose of the same material, stiffened with whalebone, puffed out well-wadded sleeves, falling bands, for he eschewed the ruff as savouring of vanity, boots of black flexible leather, ascending to the hose, and armed with spurs with gigantic rowels, a round-crowned small-brimmed black hat, with an ostrich feather placed in the side and hanging over the top, a long rapier on his hip, and a dagger in his girdle. This buckram attire, it will be easily conceived, contributed no little to the natural stiffness of his thin tall figure.

Sir Ralph Assheton was great grandson of Richard Assheton, who flourished in the time of Abbot Paslew, and who, in conjunction with John Braddyll, fourteen years after the unfortunate prelate's attainder and the dissolution of the monastery, had purchased the abbey and domains of Whalley from the Crown, subsequently to which, a division of the property so granted took place between them, the abbey and part of the manor falling to the share of Richard Assheton, whose descendants had now, for three generations, made it their residence. Thus the whole of Whalley belonged to the families of Assheton and Braddyll, which had inter-

married; the latter, as has been stated, dwelling at Portfield, a fine old seat in the neighbourhood.

A very different person from Sir Ralph was his cousin Nicholas Assheton, of Downham, who, except as regards his Puritanism, might be considered a type of the Lancashire squire of the day. A precisian in religious notions, and constant in attendance at church and lecture, he put no sort of restraint upon himself, but mixed up fox-hunting, otter-hunting, shooting at the mark, and perhaps shooting with the long-bow, foot-racing, horse-racing, and, in fact, every other kind of country diversion, not forgetting tippling, cards, and dicing, with daily devotion, discourses, and psalm-singing, in the oddest way imaginable. A thorough sports-man was Squire Nicholas Assheton, well versed in all the arts and mysteries of hawking and hunting. Not a man in the county could ride harder, hunt deer, unkennel fox, unearth badger, or spear otter, better than he. And then, as to tippling, he would sit you a whole afternoon at the alehouse, and be the merriest man there, and drink a bout with every farmer present. And if the parson chanced to be out of hearing, he would never make a mouth at a round oath, nor choose a second expression when the first would serve his turn. Then, who so constant at church or lecture as Squire Nicholas — though he did snore sometimes during the long sermons of his cousin, the Rector of Middleton. A great man was he at all weddings, christenings, churchings, and funerals, and never neglected his bottle at these ceremonies, nor any sport in doors or out of doors, meanwhile. In short, such a roystering Puritan was never known. A good-looking young man was the Squire of Downham, possessed of a very athletic frame, and a most vigorous constitution, which helped him, together with the prodigious exercise he took, through any excess. He had a sanguine complexion, with a

broad, good-natured visage, which he could lengthen at will in a surprising manner. His hair was cropped close to his head, and the razor did daily duty over his cheek and chin, giving him the roundhead look, some years later, characteristic of the Puritanical party. Nicholas had taken to wife Dorothy, daughter of Richard Greenacres of Worston, and was most fortunate in his choice, which is more than can be said for his lady, for I cannot uphold the squire as a model of conjugal fidelity. Report affirmed that he loved more than one pretty girl under the rose. Squire Nicholas was not particular as to the quality or make of his clothes, provided they wore well and protected him against the weather, and was generally to be seen in doublet and hose of stout fustian, which had seen some service, with a broad-leaved hat, originally green, but of late bleached to a much lighter colour; but he was clad on this particular occasion in ash-coloured habiliments fresh from the tailor's hands, with buff boots drawn up to the knee, and a new round hat from York with a green feather in it. His legs were slightly embowed, and he bore himself like a man rarely out of the saddle.

Downham, the residence of the squire, was a fine old house, very charmingly situated to the north of Pendle Hill, of which it commanded a magnificent view, and a few miles from Clithero. The grounds about it were well-wooded and beautifully broken and diversified, watered by the Ribble, and opening upon the lovely and extensive valley deriving its name from that stream. The house was in good order and well maintained, and the stables plentifully furnished with horses, while the hall was adorned with various trophies and implements of the chase; but as I propose paying its owner a visit, I shall defer any further description of the place till an opportunity arrives for examining it in detail.

A third cousin of Sir Ralph's, though in the second de-

gree, likewise present on the May Day in question, was the Reverend Abdias Assheton, Rector of Middleton, a very worthy man, who though differing from his kinsmen upon some religious points, and not altogether approving of the conduct of one of them, was on good terms with both. The Rector of Middleton was portly and middle-aged, fond of ease and reading, and by no means indifferent to the good things of life. He was unmarried, and passed much of his time at Middleton Hall, the seat of his near relative Sir Richard Assheton, to whose family he was greatly attached, and whose residence closely adjoined the rectory.

A fourth cousin, also present, was young Richard Assheton, of Middleton, eldest son and heir of the owner of that estate. Possessed of all the good qualities largely distributed among his kinsmen, with none of their drawbacks, this young man was as tolerant and bountiful as Sir Ralph, without his austerity and sectarianism; as keen a sportsman and as bold a rider as Nicholas, without his propensities to excess; as studious, at times, and as well read as Abdias, without his laziness and self-indulgence; and as courtly and well-bred as his father, Sir Richard, who was esteemed one of the most perfect gentlemen in the county, without his haughtiness. Then he was the handsomest of his race, though the Asshetons were accounted the handsomest family in Lancashire, and no one minded yielding the palm to young Richard, even if it could be contested, he was so modest and unassuming. At this time, Richard Assheton was about two and twenty, tall, gracefully and slightly formed, but possessed of such remarkable vigour, that even his cousin Nicholas could scarcely compete with him in athletic exercises. His features were fine and regular, with an almost Phrygian precision of outline; his hair was of a dark brown, and fell in clustering curls over his brow and neck; and his complexion was fresh

and blooming, and set off by a slight beard and moustache, carefully trimmed and pointed. His dress consisted of a dark green doublet, with wide velvet hose, embroidered and fringed, descending nearly to the knee, where they were tied with points and ribands, met by dark stockings, and terminated by red velvet shoes with roses in them. A white feather adorned his black broad-leaved hat, and he had a rapier by his side.

Amongst Sir Ralph Assheton's guests were Richard Greenacres, of Worston, Nicholas Assheton's father-in-law; Richard Sherborne, of Dunnow, near Sladeburne, who had married Dorothy, Nicholas's sister; Mistress Robinson, of Raydale House, aunt to the knight and the squire, and two of her sons, both stout youths, with John Braddyll and his wife, of Portfield. Besides these, there was Master Roger Nowell, a justice of the peace in the county, and a very active and busy one too, who had been invited for an especial purpose, to be explained hereafter. Head of an ancient Lancashire family, residing at Read, a fine old hall, some little distance from Whalley, Roger Nowell, though a worthy, well-meaning man, dealt hard measure from the bench, and seldom tempered justice with mercy. He was sharp-featured, dry, and sarcastic, and being adverse to country sports, his presence on the occasion was the only thing likely to impose restraint on the revellers. Other guests there were, but none of particular note.

The ladies of the party consisted of Lady Assheton, Mistress Nicholas Assheton, of Downham, Dorothy Assheton, of Middleton, sister to Richard, a lovely girl of eighteen, with light fleecy hair, summer blue eyes, and a complexion of exquisite purity, Mistress Sherborne, of Dunnow, Mistress Robinson, of Raydale, and Mistress Braddyll, of Portfield, beforementioned, together with the wives and daughters of some

others of the neighbouring gentry; most noticeable amongst whom was Mistress Alice Nutter, of Rough Lee, in Pendle Forest, a widow lady, and a relative of the Assheton family.

Mistress Nutter might be a year or two turned of forty, but she still retained a very fine figure, and much beauty of feature, though of a cold and disagreeable cast. She was dressed in mourning, though her husband had been dead several years, and her rich dark habiliments well became her pale complexion and raven hair. A proud poor gentleman was Richard Nutter, her late husband, and his scanty means not enabling him to keep up as large an establishment as he desired, or to be as hospitable as his nature prompted, his temper became soured, and he visited his ill humours upon his wife, who, devotedly attached to him, to all outward appearance at least, never resented his ill treatment. All at once, and without any previous symptoms of ailment, or apparent cause, unless it might be over-fatigue in hunting the day before, Richard Nutter was seized with a strange and violent illness, which after three or four days of acute suffering, brought him to the grave. During his illness he was constantly and zealously tended by his wife, but he displayed great aversion to her, declaring himself bewitched, and that an old woman was ever in the corner of his room mumbling wicked enchantments against him. But as no such old woman could be seen, these assertions were treated as delirious ravings. They were not, however, forgotten after his death, and some people said that he had certainly been bewitched, and that a waxen image made in his likeness, and stuck full of pins, had been picked up in his chamber by Mistress Alice and cast into the fire, and as soon as it melted he had expired. Such tales only obtained credence with the common folk; but as Pendle Forest was a sort of weird region, many reputed witches dwelling in it, they were the more

readily believed, even by those who acquitted Mistress Nutter of all share in the dark transaction.

Mistress Nutter gave the best proof that she respected her husband's memory by not marrying again, and she continued to lead a very secluded life at Rough Lee, a lonesome house in the heart of the forest. She lived quite by herself, for she had no children, her only daughter having perished somewhat strangely when quite an infant. Though a relative of the Asshetons, she kept up little intimacy with them, and it was a matter of surprise to all that she had been drawn from her seclusion to attend the present revel. Her motive, however, in visiting the Abbey, was to obtain the assistance of Sir Ralph Assheton, in settling a dispute between her and Roger Nowell, relative to the boundary line of part of their properties which came together; and this was the reason why the magistrate had been invited to Whalley. After hearing both sides of the question, and examining plans of the estates, which he knew to be accurate, Sir Ralph, who had been appointed umpire, pronounced a decision in favour of Roger Nowell, but Mistress Nutter refusing to abide by it, the settlement of the matter was postponed till the day but one following, between which time the landmarks were to be investigated by a certain little lawyer named Potts, who attended on behalf of Roger Nowell; together with Nicholas and Richard Assheton, on behalf of Mistress Nutter. Upon their evidence it was agreed by both parties that Sir Ralph should pronounce a final decision, to be accepted by them, and to that effect they signed an agreement. The three persons appointed to the investigation settled to start for Rough Lee early on the following morning.

A word as to Master Thomas Potts. This worthy was an attorney from London, who had officiated as clerk of the court at the assizes at Lancaster, where his quickness had so much pleased Roger Nowell, that he sent for him to Read to manage

this particular business. A sharp-witted fellow was Potts, and versed in all the quirks and tricks of a very subtle profession—not over-scrupulous, provided a client would pay well; prepared to resort to any expedient to gain his object, and quite conversant enough with both practice and precedent to keep himself straight. A bustling, consequential little personage was he, moreover; very fond of delivering an opinion, even when unasked, and of a meddling, make-mischief turn, constantly setting men by the ears. A suit of rusty black, a parchment-coloured skin, small wizen features, a turn-up nose, scant eyebrows, and a great yellow forehead constituted his external man. He partook of the hospitality at the Abbey, but had his quarters at the Dragon. He it was who counselled Roger Nowell to abide by the decision of Sir Ralph, confidently assuring him that he must carry his point.

This dispute was not, however, the only one the knight had to adjust, or in which Master Potts was concerned. A claim had recently been made by a certain Sir Thomas Metcalfe, of Nappay, in Wensleydale, near Bainbridge, to the house and manor of Raydale, belonging to his neighbour, John Robinson, whose lady, as has been shown, was a relative of the Asshetons. Robinson himself had gone to London to obtain advice on the subject, while Sir Thomas Metcalfe, who was a man of violent disposition, had threatened to take forcible possession of Raydale, if it were not delivered to him without delay, and to eject the Robinson family. Having consulted Potts, however, on the subject, whom he had met at Read, the latter strongly dissuaded him from the course, and recommended him to call to his aid the strong arm of the law; but this he rejected, though he ultimately agreed to refer the matter to Sir Ralph Assheton, and for this purpose he had come over to Whalley, and was at present a guest at the vicarage. Thus it will be seen that Sir Ralph Assheton had his hands full, while the little

London lawyer, Master Potts, was tolerably well occupied. Besides Sir Thomas Metcalfe, Sir Richard Molyneux, and Mr. Parker, of Browsholme, were guests ef Dr. Ormerod at the vicarage.

Such was the large company assembled to witness the May Day revels at Whalley, and if harmonious feelings did not exist amongst all of them, little outward manifestation was made of enmity. The dresses and appointments of the pageant having been provided by Sir Ralph Assheton, who Puritan as he was, encouraged all harmless country pastimes, it was deemed necessary to pay him every respect, even if no other feeling would have prompted the attention, and therefore the troop had stopped on seeing him and his guests issue from the Abbey gate. At pretty nearly the same time Doctor Ormerod and his party came from the vicarage towards the green.

No order of march was observed, but Sir Ralph and his lady, with two of his children by the former marriage, walked first. Then came some of the other ladies, with the Rector of Middleton, John Braddyll, and the two sons of Mistress Robinson. Next came Mistress Nutter, Roger Nowell and Potts walking after her, eyeing her maliciously, as her proud figure swept on before them. Even if she saw their looks or overheard their jeers, she did not deign to notice them. Lastly came young Richard Assheton, of Middleton, and Squire Nicholas, both in high spirits and laughing and chatting together.

"A brave day for the morris-dancers, cousin Dick," observed Nicholas Assheton, as they approached the green, "and plenty of folk to witness the sport. Half my lads from Downham are here, and I see a good many of your Middleton chaps among them. How are you, Farmer Tetlow?" he added to a stout, hale-looking man, with a blooming country

woman by his side, — "brought your pretty young wife to the rush-bearing, I see."

"Yeigh, squoire," rejoined the farmer, "an mightily pleased hoo be wi' it, too."

"Happy to hear it, Master Tetlow," replied Nicholas, "she'll be better pleased before the day 's over, I'll warrant her. I 'll dance a round with her myself in the hall at night."

"Theere now, Meg, whoy dunna ye may t' squoire a curtsey, wench, an thonk him," said Tetlow, nudging his pretty wife, who had turned away, rather embarrassed by the free gaze of the squire. Nicholas, however, did not wait for the curtsey, but went away, laughing, to overtake Richard Assheton, who had walked on.

"Ah, here 's Frank Garside," he contiuued, espying another rustic acquaintance. "Halloa, Frank, I 'll come over one day next week, and try for a fox in Easington Woods. We missed the last, you know. Tom Brockholes, are you here? Just ridden over from Sladeburn, eh? When is that shooting match at the bodkin to come off, eh? Mind, it is to be at twenty-two roods' distance. Ride over to Downham on Thursday next, Tom. We're to have a foot-race, and I'll show you good sport, and at night we 'll have a lusty drinking bout at the alehouse. On Friday, we 'll take out the great nets, and try for salmon in the Ribble. I took some fine fish on Monday — one salmon of ten pounds' weight, the largest I've got the whole season. — I brought it with me to-day to the Abbey. There 's an otter in the river, and I won't hunt him till you come, Tom. I shall see you on Thursday, eh?"

Receiving an answer in the affirmative, squire Nicholas walked on, nodding right and left, jesting with the farmers, and ogling their pretty wives and daughters.

"I tell you what, cousin Dick," he said, calling after Richard Assheton, who had got in advance of him, "I 'll match

my dun nag against your gray gelding for twenty pieces, that I reach the boundary line of the Rough Lee lands before you to-morrow. What, you won't have it? You know I shall beat you — ha! ha! Well, we 'll try the speed of the two tits the first day we hunt the stag in Bowland Forest. Odds my life!" he cried, suddenly altering his deportment and lengthening his visage, "if there isn't our parson here. Stay with me, cousin Dick, stay with me. Give you good day, worthy Mr. Dewhurst," he added, taking off his hat to the divine, who respectfully returned his salutation, "I did not look to see your reverence here, taking part in these vanities and idle sports. I propose to call on you on Saturday, and pass an hour in serious discourse. I would call to-morrow, but I have to ride over to Pendle on business. Tarry a moment for me, I pray you, good cousin Richard. I fear, reverend Sir, that you will see much here that will scandalise you; much lightness and indecorum. Pleasanter far would it be to me to see a large congregation of the elders flocking together to a godly meeting, than crowds assembled for such a profane purpose. Another moment, Richard. My cousin is a young man, Mr. Dewhurst, and wishes to join the revel. But we must make allowances, worthy and reverend Sir, until the world shall improve. An excellent discourse you gave us, good Sir, on Sunday: viii. Rom. 12 and 13 verses: it is graven upon my memory, but I have made a note of it in my diary. I come to you, cousin, I come. I pray you walk on to the abbey, good Mr. Dewhurst, where you will be right welcome, and call for any refreshment you may desire — a glass of good sack, and a slice of venison pasty, on which we have just dined — and there is some famous old ale, which I would commend to you, but that I know you care not, any more than myself, for creature comforts. Farewell, reverend Sir. I will join you ere

long, for these scenes have little attraction for me. But I must take care that my young cousin falleth not into harm."

And as the divine took his way to the Abbey, he added, laughingly, to Richard, — "A good riddance, Dick. I would not have the old fellow play the spy upon us. — Ah, Giles Mercer," he added, stopping again, — "and Jeff Rushton — well met, lads! what, are you come to the wake? I shall be at John Lawe's in the evening, and we 'll have a glass together — John brews sack rarely, and spareth not the eggs."

"Boh yo 'n be at th' dauncing at th' Abbey, squoire," said one of the farmers.

"Curse the dancing!" cried Nicholas, — "I hope the parson didn't hear me," he added, turning round quickly. "Well, well, I 'll come down when the dancing 's over, and we 'll make a night of it." And he ran on to overtake Richard Assheton.

By this time the respective parties from the Abbey and the Vicarage having united, they walked on together, Sir Ralph Assheton after courteously exchanging salutations with Dr. Ormerod's guests, still keeping a little in advance of the company. Sir Thomas Metcalfe comported himself with more than his wonted haughtiness, and bowed so superciliously to Mistress Robinson that her two sons glanced angrily at each other, as if in doubt whether they should not instantly resent the affront. Observing this, as well as what had previously taken place, Nicholas Assheton stepped quickly up to them, and said,

"Keep quiet, lads. Leave this dunghill cock to me, and I 'll lower his crest."

With this he pushed forward, and elbowing Sir Thomas rudely out of the way, turned round, and instead of apologising, eyed him coolly and contemptuously from head to foot.

"Are you drunk, Sir, that you forget your manners?" asked Sir Thomas, laying his hand upon his sword.

"Not so drunk but that I know how to conduct myself like a gentleman, Sir Thomas," rejoined Nicholas, "which is more than can be said for a certain person of my acquaintance, who, for aught I know, has only taken his morning pint."

"You wish to pick a quarrel with me, Master Nicholas Assheton, I perceive," said Sir Thomas, stepping close up to him, "and I will not disappoint you. You shall render me good reason for this affront before I leave Whalley."

"When and where you please, Sir Thomas," rejoined Nicholas, laughing. "At any hour, and at any weapon, I am your man."

At this moment, Master Potts, who had scented a quarrel afar, and who would have liked it well enough if its prosecution had not run counter to his own interests, quitted Roger Nowell, and ran back to Metcalfe, and plucking him by the sleeve, said, in a low voice,

"This is not the way to obtain quiet possession of Raydale House, Sir Thomas. Master Nicholas Assheton," he added, turning to him, "I must entreat you, my good Sir, to be moderate. Gentlemen, both, I caution you that I have my eye upon you. You well know there is a magistrate here, my singular good friend and honoured client, Master Roger Nowell, and if you pursue this quarrel further, I shall hold it my duty to have you bound over by that worthy gentleman in sufficient securities to keep the peace towards our sovereign lord the king and all his lieges, and particularly towards each other. You understand me, gentlemen?"

"Perfectly," replied Nicholas. "I drink at John Lawe's to-night, Sir Thomas."

So saying, he walked away. Metcalfe would have followed him, but was withheld by Potts.

"Let him go, Sir Thomas," said the little man of law; "let him go. Once master of Raydale, you can do as you please. Leave the settlement of the matter to me. I 'll just whisper a word in Sir Ralph Assheton's ear, and you 'll hear no more of it."

"Fire and fury!" growled Sir Thomas. "I like not this mode of settling a quarrel; and unless this hot-headed psalm-singing puritan apologises, I shall assuredly cut his throat."

"Or he yours, good Sir Thomas," rejoined Potts. "Better sit in Raydale Hall, than lie in the abbey vaults."

"Well, we 'll talk over the matter, Master Potts," replied the knight.

"A nice morning's work I 've made of it," mused Nicholas, as he walked along; "here I have a dance with a farmer's pretty wife, a discourse with a parson, a drinking-bout with a couple of clowns, and a duello with a blustering knight on my hands. Quite enough, o' my conscience! but I must get through it the best way I can. And now, hey for the May-pole and the morris-dancers!"

Nicholas just got up in time to witness the presentation of the May Queen to Sir Ralph Assheton and his lady, and like every one else he was greatly struck by her extreme beauty and natural grace.

The little ceremony was thus conducted. When the company from the abbey drew near the troop of revellers, the usher taking Alizon's hand in the tips of his fingers as before, strutted forward with her to Sir Ralph and his lady, and falling upon one knee before them, said — "Most worshipful and honoured knight, and you his lovely dame, and you the tender and cherished olive branches growing round about their

tables, I hereby crave your gracious permission to present unto your honours our chosen queen of May."

Somewhat fluttered by the presentation, Alizon yet maintained sufficient composure to bend gracefully before Lady Assheton, and say in a very sweet voice, "I fear your ladyship will think the choice of the village hath fallen ill in alighting upon me; and, indeed, I feel myself altogether unworthy the distinction; nevertheless I will endeavour to discharge my office fittingly, and therefore pray you, fair lady, and the worshipful knight, your husband, together with your beauteous children, and the gentles all by whom you are surrounded, to grace our little festival with your presence, hoping you may find as much pleasure in the sight as we shall do in offering it to you."

"A fair maid, and modest as she is fair," observed Sir Ralph, with a condescending smile.

"In sooth is she," replied Lady Assheton, raising her kindly, and saying, as she did so,

"Nay, you must not kneel to us, sweet maid. You are queen of May, and it is for us to show respect to you during your day of sovereignty. Your wishes are commands; and, in behalf of my husband, my children, and our guests, I answer, that we will gladly attend your revels on the green."

"Well said, dear Nell," observed Sir Ralph. "We should be churlish, indeed, were we to refuse the bidding of so lovely a queen."

"Nay, you have called the roses in earnest to her cheek, now, Sir Ralph," observed Lady Assheton, smiling. "Lead on, fair queen," she continued, "and tell your companions to begin their sports when they please.— Only remember this, that we shall hope to see all your gay troop this evening, at the abbey, to a merry dance."

"Where I will strive to find her majesty a suitable partner,"

added Sir Ralph. "Stay, she shall make her choice now, as a royal personage should; for you know, Nell, a queen ever chooseth her partner, whether it be for the throne or for the brawl. How say you, fair one? Shall it be either of our young cousins, Joe or Will Robinson, of Raydale. Or our cousin, who still thinketh himself young, Squire Nicholas, of Downham."

"Ay, let it be me, I implore of you, fair queen," interposed Nicholas.

"He is engaged already," observed Richard Assheton, coming forward. "I heard him ask pretty Mistress Tetlow, the farmer's wife, to dance with him this evening at the Abbey."

A loud laugh from those around followed this piece of information, but Nicholas was in no wise disconcerted.

"Dick would have her choose him, and that is why he interferes with me," he observed. "How say you, fair queen! Shall it be our hopeful cousin? I will answer for him that he danceth the coranto and lavolta indifferently well."

On hearing Richard Assheton's voice, all the colour had forsaken Alizon's cheeks; but at this direct appeal to her by Nicholas it returned with additional force, and the change did not escape the quick eye of Lady Assheton.

"You perplex her, cousin Nicholas," she said.

"Not a whit, Eleanor," answered the squire; "but if she like not Dick Assheton, there is another Dick, Dick Sherburne, of Sladeburn; or our cousin Jack Braddyll; or, if she prefer an older and discreeter man, there is Father Greenacres, of Worsten, or Master Roger Nowell, of Read — plenty of choice."

"Nay, if I must choose a partner, it shall be a young one," said Alizon.

"Right, fair queen, right," cried Nicholas, laughing. "Ever choose a young man if you can. Who shall it be?"

"You have named him yourself, Sir," replied Alizon, in a voice which she endeavoured to keep firm, but which, in spite of all her efforts, sounded tremulously — "Master Richard Assheton."

"Next to choosing me, you could not have chosen better," observed Nicholas, approvingly. "Dick, lad, I congratulate thee."

"I congratulate myself," replied the young man. "Fair queen," he added, advancing, "highly flattered am I by your choice, and shall so demean myself, I trust, as to prove myself worthy of it. Before I go I would beg a boon from you — that flower."

"This pink," cried Alizon. "It is your's, fair Sir."

Young Assheton took the flower and took the hand that offered it at the same time, and pressed the latter, to his lips, while Lady Assheton, who had been made a little uneasy by Alizon's apparent emotion, and who with true feminine tact immediately detected its cause, called out — "Now, forward — forward to the May Pole! We have interrupted the revel too long."

Upon this, the May Queen stepped blushingly back with the usher, who, with his white wand in hand, had stood bolt upright behind her, immensely delighted with the scene in which his pupil — for Alizon had been tutored by him for the occasion — had taken part. Sir Ralph then clapped his hands loudly, and at this signal, the tabor and pipe struck up; the Fool and the Hobby-horse, who, though idle all the time, had indulged in a little quiet fun with the rustics, recommenced their gambols; the Morris-dancers their lively dance; and the whole train moved towards the May Pole, followed by the rush-cart, with all its bells jingling, and all its garlands waving.

As to Alizon, her brain was in a whirl, and her bosom heaved so quickly, that she thought she should faint. To think that the choice of a partner in the dance at the abbey had been offered her, and that she should venture to choose Master Richard Assheton! She could scarcely credit her own temerity. And then to think that she should give him a flower, and more than all, that he should kiss her hand in return for it! She felt the tingling pressure of his lips upon her fingers still, and her little heart palpitated strangely.

As she approached the May Pole, and the troop again halted for a few minutes, she saw her brother James, holding little Jennet by the hand, standing in the front line to look at her.

"Oh, how I 'm glad to see you here, Jennet!" she cried.

"An ey 'm glad to see yo, Alizon," replied the little girl. "Jem has towd me whot a grand partner you 're to ha' this e'en." And she added, with playful malice, "Who was wrong whon she said the queen could choose Master Richard —"

"Hush, Jennet, not a word more," interrupted Alizon, blushing.

"Oh! ey dunna mean to vex ye, ey 'm sure," replied Jennet. "Ey 've got a present for ye."

"A present for me, Jennet," cried Alizon, "what is it?"

"A beautiful white dove," replied the little girl.

"A white dove! Where did you get it? Let me see it," cried Alizon, in a breath.

"Here it is," replied Jennet, opening her kirtle.

"A beautiful bird, indeed," cried Alizon. "Take care of it for me till I come home."

"Which winna be till late, ey fancy," rejoined Jennet, roguishly. "Ah!" she added, uttering a cry.

The latter exclamation was occasioned by the sudden flight of the dove, which escaping from her hold, soared aloft.

Jennet followed the course of its silver wings, as they cleaved the blue sky, and then all at once saw a large hawk, which apparently had been hovering about, swoop down upon it, and bear it off. Some white feathers fell down near the little girl, and she picked up one of them and put it in her breast.

"Poor bird!" exclaimed the May Queen.

"Eigh, poor bird!" echoed Jennet, tearfully. "Ah ye dunna knoa aw, Alizon."

"Weel, there 's neaw use whimpering abowt a duv," observed Jem, gruffly. "Ey'n bring ye another t' furst time ey go to Cown."

"There 's nah another bird like that," sobbed the little girl. "Shoot that cruel hawk fo' me Jem, win ye."

"How conney wench, whon it 's flown away," he replied. "Boh ey'n rob a hawk's neest fo ye if that 'll do os weel."

"Yo dunna understand me, Jem," replied the child, sadly.

At this moment, the music which had ceased while some arrangements were made, commenced a very lively tune, known as "Round about the May Pole," and Robin Hood taking the May Queen's hand, led her towards the pole, and placing her near it, the whole of her attendants took hands, while a second circle was formed by the morris-dancers, and both began to wheel rapidly round her, the music momently increasing in spirit and quickness. An irresistible desire to join in the measure seized some of the lads and lasses around, and they likewise took hands, and presently a third, and still wider circle was formed, wheeling gaily round the other two. Other dances were formed here and there, and presently the whole green was in movement.

"If you come off heart-whole to-night, Dick, I shall be surprised," observed Nicholas, who with his young relative had approached as near the May Pole as the three rounds of dancers would allow them.

Richard Assheton made no reply, but glanced at the pink which he had placed in his doublet.

"Who is the May Queen?" inquired Sir Thomas Metcalfe, who had likewise drawn near, of a tall man holding a little girl by the hand.

"Alizon, dowter of Elizabeth Device, an mey sister," replied James Device, gruffly.

"Humph!" muttered Sir Thomas, "she is a well-looking lass. And she dwells here — in Whalley, fellow?" he added.

"Hoo dwells i' Whalley," responded Jem, sullenly.

"I can easily find her abode," muttered the knight, walking away.

"What was it Sir Thomas said to you, Jem?" inquired Nicholas, who had watched the knight's gestures, coming up.

Jem related what had passed between them.

"What the devil does he want with her?" cried Nicholas. "No good I 'm sure. But I 'll spoil his sport."

"Say boh t' word, squoire, an ey'n break every boan i' his body," remarked Jem.

"No, no, Jem," replied Nicholas. "Take care of your pretty sister, and I 'll take care of him."

At this juncture, Sir Thomas, who, in spite of the efforts of the pacific Master Potts to tranquillise him, had been burning with wrath at the affront he had received from Nicholas, came up to Richard Assheton, and noticing the pink in his bosom, snatched it away suddenly.

"I want a flower," he said, smelling at it.

"Instantly restore it, Sir Thomas!" cried Richard Assheton, pale with rage, "or —"

"What will you do, young Sir?" rejoined the knight, tauntingly, and plucking the flower in pieces. "You can get another from the fair nymph who gave you this."

Further speech was not allowed the knight, for he received a violent blow on the chest from the hand of Richard Assheton, which sent him reeling backwards, and would have felled him to the ground if he had not been caught by some of the bystanders. The moment he recovered, Sir Thomas drew his sword, and furiously assaulted young Assheton, who stood ready for him, and after the exchange of a few passes, for none of the bystanders dared to interfere, sent his sword whirling over their heads through the air.

"Bravo, Dick," cried Nicholas, stepping up, and clapping his cousin on the back, "you have read him a good lesson, and taught him that he cannot always insult folks with impunity, ha! ha!" And he laughed loudly at the discomfited knight.

"He is an insolent coward," said Richard Assheton. "Give him his sword and let him come on again."

"No, no," said Nicholas, "he has had enough this time. And if he has not, he must settle an account with me. Put up your blade, lad."

"I 'll be revenged upon you both," said Sir Thomas, taking his sword, which had been brought him by a bystander, and stalking away.

"You leave us in mortal dread, doughty knight," cried Nicholas, shouting after him, derisively, "ha! ha! ha!"

Richard Assheton's attention was, however, turned in a different direction, for the music suddenly ceasing, and the dancers stopping, he learnt that the May Queen had fainted, and presently afterwards the crowd opened to give passage to Robin Hood, who bore her inanimate form in his arms.

CHAPTER IV.

Alice Nutter.

THE quarrel between Nicholas Assheton and Sir Thomas Metcalfe had already been made known to Sir Ralph by the officious Master Potts, and though it occasioned the knight much displeasure, as interfering with the amicable arrangement he hoped to effect with Sir Thomas for his relatives the Robinsons, still he felt sure that he had sufficient influence with his hot-headed cousin, the squire, to prevent the dispute from being carried further, and he only waited the conclusion of the sports on the green, to take him to task. What was the knight's surprise and annoyance, therefore, to find that a new brawl had sprung up, and ignorant of its precise cause, he laid it entirely at the door of the turbulent Nicholas. Indeed, on the commencement of the fray he imagined that the squire was personally concerned in it, and, full of wroth, flew to the scene of action; but before he got there, the affair, which, as has been seen, was of short duration, was fully settled, and he only heard the jeers addressed to the retreating combatant by Nicholas. It was not Sir Ralph's way to vent his choler in words, but the squire knew in an instant, from the expression of his countenance, that he was greatly incensed, and therefore hastened to explain.

"What means this unseemly disturbance, Nicholas?" cried Sir Ralph, not allowing the other to speak. "You are ever brawling like an Alsatian squire. Independently of the ill-example set to these good folk, who have met here for tranquil amusement, you have counteracted all my plans for the adjustment of the differences between Sir Thomas Metcalfe and our aunt, of Raydale. If you forget what is due to yourself, Sir, do not forget what is due to me, and to the name you bear."

"No one but yourself should say as much to me, Sir Ralph," rejoined Nicholas, somewhat haughtily, "but you are under a misapprehension. It is not I who have been fighting, though I should have acted in precisely the same manner as our cousin Dick, if I had received the same affront, and so I make bold to say, would you. Our name shall suffer no discredit from me; and as a gentleman, I assert, that Sir Thomas Metcalfe has only received due chastisement, as you yourself will admit, cousin, when you know all."

"I know him to be overbearing," observed Sir Ralph.

"Overbearing is not the word, cousin," interrupted Nicholas, "he is as proud as a peacock, and would trample upon us all, and gore us, too, like one of the wild bulls of Bowland, if we would let him have his way. But I would treat him as I would the bull aforesaid, a wild boar, or any other savage and intractable beast, hunt him down, and poll his horns, or pluck out his tusks."

"Come, come, Nicholas, this is no very gentle language," remarked Sir Ralph.

"Why, to speak truth, cousin, I do not feel in any very gentle frame of mind," rejoined the squire; "my ire has been roused by this insolent braggart, my blood is up, and I long to be doing."

"Unchristian feelings, Nicholas," said Sir Ralph, severely, "and should be overcome. Turn the other cheek to the smiter. I trust you bear no malice to Sir Thomas."

"I bear him no malice, for I hope malice is not in my nature, cousin," replied Nicholas, "but I owe him a grudge, and when a fitting opportunity occurs —"

"No more of this, unless you would really incur my displeasure," rejoined Sir Ralph; "the matter has gone far enough, too far, perhaps, for amendment, and if you know it not, I can tell you that Sir Thomas's claims to Raydale will

be difficult to dispute, and so our uncle Robinson has found since he hath taken counsel on the case."

"Have a care, Sir Ralph," said Nicholas, noticing that Master Potts was approaching them, with his ears evidently wide open, "there is that little London lawyer hovering about. But I 'll give the cunning fox a double. I 'm glad to hear you say so, Sir Ralph," he added, in a tone calculated to reach Potts, "and since our uncle Robinson is so sure of his cause, it may be better to let this blustering knight be. Perchance, it is the certainty of failure that makes him so insensate."

"This is meant to blind me, but it shall not serve your turn, cautelous squire," muttered Potts; "I caught enough of what fell just now from Sir Ralph to satisfy me that he hath strong misgivings. But it is best not to appear too secure. — Ah, Sir Ralph," he added, coming forward, "I was right, you see, in my caution. I am a man of peace, and strive to prevent quarrels and bloodshed. Quarrel if you please — and unfortunately men are prone to anger — but always settle your disputes in a court of law; always in a court of law, Sir Ralph. That is the only arena where a sensible man should ever fight. Take good advice, fee your council well, and the chances are ten to one in your favour. That is what I say to my worthy and singular good client, Sir Thomas; but he is somewhat headstrong and vehement, and will not listen to me. He is for settling matters by the sword, for making forcible entries and detainers, and ousting the tenants in possession, whereby he would render himself liable to arrest, fine, ransom, and forfeiture, instead of proceeding cautiously and decorously as the law directs, and as I advise, Sir Ralph, by writ of *ejectione firmæ* or action of trespass, the which would assuredly establish his title, and restore him the house and lands. Or he may proceed by writ of right, which, perhaps, in his case, considering the long absence of possession, and the doubts

supposed to perplex the title — though I myself have no doubts about it — would be the most efficacious. These are your only true weapons, Sir Ralph, — your writs of entry, assise, and right, — your pleas of novel disseisin, post-disseisin, and re-disseisin, — your remitters, your præcipes, your pones, and your recordari faciases. These are the sword, shield, and armour of proof of a wise man."

"Zounds! you take away one's breath with this hail-storm of writs and pleas, master lawyer!" cried Nicholas. "But in one respect I am of your 'worthy and singular good' client's opinion, and would rather trust to my own hand for the defence of my property than to the law to keep it for me."

"Then you would do wrong, good Master Nicholas," rejoined Potts, with a smile of supréme contempt; "for the law is the better guardian and the stronger adversary of the two, and so Sir Thomas will find if he takes my advice, and obtains, as he can and will do, a perfect title *juris et seisinæ conjunctionem*."

"Sir Thomas is still willing to refer the case to my arbitrement, I believe, Sir?" demanded Sir Ralph, uneasily.

"He was so, Sir Ralph," rejoined Potts, "unless the assaults and batteries, with intent to do him grievous corporal hurt, which he hath sustained from your relatives, have induced a change of mind in him. But as I premised, Sir Ralph, I am a man of peace, and willing to intermediate."

"Provided you get your fee, master lawyer," observed Nicholas, sarcastically.

"Certainly, I object not to the *quiddam honorarium*, Master Nicholas," rejoined Potts; "and if my client hath the *quid pro quo*, and gaineth his point, he cannot complain. — But what is this? Some fresh disturbance!"

"Something hath happened to the May Queen," cried Nicholas.

"I trust not," said Sir Ralph, with real concern. "Ha! she has fainted. They are bringing her this way. Poor maid! what can have occasioned this sudden seizure?"

"I think I could give a guess," muttered Nicholas. "Better remove her to the Abbey," he added aloud to the knight.

"You are right," said Sir Ralph. "Our cousin Dick is near her, I observe. He shall see her conveyed there at once."

At this moment Lady Assheton, and Mistress Nutter, with some of the other ladies, came up.

"Just in time, Nell," cried the knight. "Have you your smelling-bottle about you? The May Queen has fainted."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Lady Assheton, springing towards Alizon, who was now sustained by young Richard Assheton; the forester having surrendered her to him. "How has this happened?" she inquired, giving her to breathe at a small phial.

"That I cannot tell you, cousin," replied Richard Assheton, "unless from some sudden fright."

"That was it, Master Richard," cried Robin Hood; "she cried out on hearing the clashing of swords, just now, and, I think, pronounced your name, on finding you engaged with Sir Thomas, and immediately after turned pale, and would have fallen if I had not caught her."

"Ah, indeed!" exclaimed Lady Assheton, glancing at Richard, whose eyes fell before her inquiring gaze. "But see, she revives," pursued the lady. "Let me support her head."

As she spoke Alizon opened her eyes, and perceiving Richard Assheton, who had relinquished her to his relative, standing beside her, she exclaimed, "Oh! you are safe! I feared" — And then she stopped, greatly embarrassed.

"You feared he might be in danger from his fierce adversary," supplied Lady Assheton; "but no. The conflict is happily over, and he is unhurt."

"I am glad of it," said Alizon, earnestly.

"She had better be taken to the Abbey," remarked Sir Ralph, coming up.

"Nay, she will be more at ease at home," observed Lady Assheton, with a significant look, which, however, failed in reaching her husband.

"Yes, truly shall I, gracious lady," replied Alizon, "far more so. I have given you trouble enough already."

"No trouble at all," said Sir Ralph, kindly; "her ladyship is too happy to be of service in a case like this. Are you not, Nell? The faintness will pass off presently. But let her go to the Abbey at once, and remain there till the evening festivities, in which she takes part, commence. Give her your arm, Dick."

Sir Ralph's word was law, and therefore Lady Assheton made no remonstrance. But she said, quickly, "I will take care of her myself."

"I require no assistance, Madam," replied Alizon, "since Sir Ralph will have me go. Nay, you are too kind, too condescending," she added, reluctantly taking Lady Assheton's proffered arm.

And in this way they proceeded slowly towards the Abbey, escorted by Richard Assheton, and attended by Mistress Braddyll and some others of the ladies.

Amongst those who had watched the progress of the May Queen's restoration with most interest was Mistress Nutter, though she had not interfered; and as Alizon departed with Lady Assheton, she observed to Nicholas, who was standing near,

"Can this be the daughter of Elizabeth Device, and granddaughter of—"

"Your old Pendle witch, Mother Demdike," supplied Nicholas; "the very same, I assure you, Mistress Nutter."

"She is wholly unlike the family," observed the lady, "and her features resemble some I have seen before."

"She does not resemble her mother, undoubtedly," replied Nicholas, "though what her grand-dame may have been some sixty years ago, when she was Alizon's age, it would be difficult to say. — She is no beauty now."

"Those finely modelled features, that graceful figure, and those delicate hands, cannot surely belong to one lowly born and bred?" said Mistress Nutter.

"They differ from the ordinary peasant mould, truly," replied Nicholas. "If you ask me for the lineage of a steed, I can give a guess at it on sight of the animal, but as regards our own race, I'm at fault, Mistress Nutter."

"I must question Elizabeth Device about her," observed Alice. "Strange, I should never have seen her before, though I know the family so well."

"I wish you did not know Mother Demdike quite so well, Mistress Nutter," remarked Nicholas — "a mischievous and malignant old witch, who deserves the tar-barrel. The only marvel is, that she has not been burned long ago. I am of opinion, with many others, that it was she who bewitched your poor husband, Richard Nutter."

"I do not think it," replied Mistress Nutter, with a mournful shake of the head. "Alas, poor man! he died from hard riding, after hard drinking. That was the only witchcraft in his case. Be warned by his fate yourself, Nicholas."

"Hard riding after drinking was more likely to sober him than to kill him," rejoined the squire. "But, as I said just now, I like not this Mother Demdike, nor her rival in iniquity,

old Mother Chattox. The devil only knows which of the two is worst. But if the former hag did not bewitch your husband to death, as I shrewdly suspect, it is certain that the latter mumbling old miscreant killed my elder brother, Richard, by her sorceries."

"Mother Chattox did you a good turn then, Nicholas," observed Mistress Nutter, "in making you master of the fair estates of Downham."

"Sy far, perhaps, she might," rejoined Nicholas, "but I do not like the manner of it, and would gladly see her burned; nay, I would fire the faggots myself."

"You are superstitious as the rest, Nicholas," said Mistress Nutter. "For my part I do not believe in the existence of witches."

"Not believe in witches, with these two living proofs to the contrary?" cried Nicholas, in amazement. "Why Pendle Forest swarms with witches. They burrow in the hill-side like rabbits in a warren. They are the terror of the whole country. No man's cattle, goods, nor even life, are safe from them, and the only reason why these two old hags who hold sovereign sway over the others have 'scaped justice so long, is because every one is afraid to go near them. Their solitary habitations are more strongly guarded than fortresses. Not believe in witches! Why I should as soon misdoubt the Holy Scriptures."

"It may be because I reside near them that I have so little apprehension, or rather no apprehension at all," replied Mistress Nutter; "but to me Mother Demdike and Mother Chattox appear two harmless old women."

"They 're a couple of dangerous and damnable old hags, and deserve the stake," cried Nicholas, emphatically.

All this discourse had been swallowed with greedy ears by

the ever-vigilant Master Potts, who had approached the speakers unperceived; and he now threw in a word.

"So there are suspected witches in Pendle Forest, I find," he said. "I shall make it my business to institute inquiries concerning them, when I visit the place to-morrow. Even if merely ill-reputed, they must be examined, and if found innocent cleared; if not, punished according to the statute. Our sovereign lord the king holdeth witches in especial abhorrence, and would gladly see all such noxious vermin extirpated from the land, and it will rejoice me to promote his laudable designs. I must pray you to afford me all the assistance you can in the discovery of these dreadful delinquents, good Master Nicholas, and I will care that your services are duly represented in the proper quarter. 'As I have just said, the king taketh singular interest in witchcraft, as you may judge if the learned tractate he hath put forth, in form of a dialogue, intituled "*Dæmonologie*," hath ever met your eye; and he is never so well pleased as when the truth of his tenets are proved by such secret offenders being brought to light, and duly punished."

"The king's known superstitious dread of witches makes men seek them out to win his favour," observed Mistress Nutter. "They have wonderfully increased since the publication of that baneful book!"

"Not so, Madam," replied Potts. "Our sovereign lord the king hath a wholesome and just hatred of such evil-doers and traitors to himself and heaven, and it may be dread of them, as indeed all good men must have; but he would protect his subjects from them, and therefore, in the first year of his reign, which I trust will be long and prosperous, he hath passed a statute, whereby it is enacted 'that all persons invoking any evil spirit, or consulting, covenanting with, entertaining, employing, feeding, or rewarding any evil

spirit. Or taking up dead bodies from their graves to be used in any witchcraft, sorcery, charm, or enchantment. Or killing or otherwise hurting any person by such infernal arts, shall be guilty of felony without benefit of clergy, and suffer death.' This statute, Madam, was intended to check the crimes of necromancy, sorcery, and witchcraft, and not to increase them. And I maintain that it has checked them, and will continue to check them."

"It is a wicked and bloody statute," observed Mistress Nutter, in a deep tone, "and many an innocent life will be sacrificed thereby."

"How, Madam!" cried Master Potts, staring aghast. "Do you mean to impugn the sagacity and justice of our high and mighty king, the head of the law, and defender of the faith?"

"I affirm that this is a sanguinary enactment," replied Mistress Nutter, "and will put power into hands that will abuse it, and destroy many guiltless persons. It will make more witches than it will find."

"Some are ready made, methinks," muttered Potts, "and we need not go far to find them. You are a zealous advocate for witches, I must say, Madam," he added, aloud, "and I shall not forget your arguments in their favour."

"To my prejudice, I doubt not," she rejoined bitterly.

"No, to the credit of your humanity," he answered, bowing, with pretended conviction.

"Well, I will aid you in your search for witches, Master Potts," observed Nicholas; "for I would gladly see the country rid of these pests. But I warn you the quest will be attended with risk, and you will get few to accompany you, for all the folk hereabouts are mortally afraid of these terrible old hags."

"I fear nothing in the discharge of my duty," replied Master Potts, courageously, "for as our high and mighty sovereign hath well and learnedly observed — 'if witches be

but apprehended and detained by any private person, upon other private respects, their power, no doubt, either in escaping, or in doing hurt, is no less than ever it was before. But if, on the other part, their apprehending and detention be by the lawful magistrate upon the just respect of their guiltiness in that craft, their power is then no greater than before that ever they meddled with their master. For where God begins justly to strike by his lawful lieutenants, it is not in the devil's power to defraud or bereave him of the office or effect of his powerful and revenging sceptre.' Thus I am safe; and I shall take care to go armed with a proper warrant, which I shall obtain from a magistrate, my honoured friend and singular good client, Master Roger Nowell. This will obtain me such assistance as I may require, and for due observance of my authority I shall likewise take with me a peace-officer, or constable."

"You will do well, Master Potts," said Nicholas; "still you must not put faith in all the idle tales told you, for the common folk hereabouts are blindly and foolishly superstitious, and fancy they discern witchcraft in every mischance, however slight, that befals them. If ale turn sour after a thunder-storm the witch hath done it; and if the butter cometh not quickly, she hindereth it. If the meat roast ill the witch hath turned the spit; and if the lumber pie taste ill she hath had a finger in it. If your sheep have the foot-rot — your horses the staggers or stringhalt — your swine the measles — your hounds a surfeit — or your cow slippeth her calf — the witch is at the bottom of it all. If your maid hath a fit of the sullens, or doeth her work amiss, or your man breaketh a dish, the witch is in fault, and her shoulders can bear the blame. On this very day of the year — namely, May Day, — the foolish folk hold any aged crone who fetcheth fire to be a witch, and if they catch a hedge-hog among their cattle, they will instantly beat it to

death with sticks, concluding it to be an old hag in that form come to dry up the milk of their kine."

"These are what Master Potts's royal authority would style 'mere old wives' trattles about the fire,'" observed Mistress Nutter, scornfully.

"Better be over-credulous than over-sceptical," replied Potts. "Even at my lodging in Chancery Lane I have a horse-shoe nailed against the door. One cannot be too cautious when one has to fight against the devil, or those in league with him. Your witch should be put to every ordeal. She should be scratched with pins to draw blood from her; weighed against the church bible, though this is not always proof; forced to weep, for a witch can only shed three tears, and those only from the left eye; or, as our sovereign lord the king truly observeth — no offence to you, Mistress Nutter — 'Not so much as their eyes are able to shed tears, albeit the women-kind especially be able otherwise to shed tears at every light occasion when they will, yea, although it were dissemblingly like the crocodile;' and set on a stool for twenty-four hours, with her legs tied across, and suffered neither to eat, drink, nor sleep during the time. This is the surest way to make her confess her guilt next to swimming. If it fails, then cast her with her thumbs and toes tied across into a pond, and if she sink not then is she certainly a witch. Other trials there are, as that by scalding water — sticking knives across — heating of the horse-shoe — tying of knots — the sieve and the shears; but the only ordeals safely to be relied on, are the swimming and the stool before-mentioned, and from these your witch shall rarely escape. Above all, be sure and search carefully for the witch-mark. I doubt not we shall find it fairly and legibly writ in the devil's characters on Mother Demdike and Mother Chattox. They shall undergo the stool and the pool, and other trials, if required. These old hags shall no longer

vex you, good Master Nicholas. Leave them to me, and doubt not I will bring them to condign punishment."

"You will do us good service then, Master Potts," replied Nicholas. "But, since you are so learned in the matter of witchcraft, resolve me, I pray you, how it is, that women are so much more addicted to the practice of the black art, than our own sex."

"The answer to the inquiry hath been given by our British Solomon," replied Potts, "and I will deliver it to you in his own words. 'The reason is easy,' he saith, 'for as that sex is frailer than man is, so it is easier to be entrapped in those gross snares of the devil, as was overwell proved to be true, by the serpent's deceiving of Eva at the beginning, which makes him the homelier with that sex sensine.'"

"A good and sufficient reason, Master Potts," said Nicholas, laughing; "Is it not so, Mistress Nutter?"

"Ay, marry, if it satisfies you," she answered, drily. "It is of a piece with the rest of the reasoning of the royal pedant, whom Master Potts styles the British Solomon."

"I only give the learned monarch the title by which he is recognised throughout Christendom," rejoined Potts, sharply.

"Well, there is comfort in the thought, that I shall never be taken for a wizard," said the squire.

"Be not too sure of that, good Master Nicholas," returned Potts. "Our prescient prince seems to have had you in his eye when he penned his description of a wizard, for, he saith, 'A great number of them that ever have been convict or confessors of witchcraft, as may be presently seen by many that have at this time confessed, are some of them rich and worldly-wise; some of them fat or corpulent in their bodies; and most part of them altogether given over to the pleasures of the flesh, continual haunting of company, and all kinds of merriness, lawful and unlawful.' This hitteth you exactly, Master Nicholas."

"Zounds!" exclaimed the squire, "if this be exact, it toucheth me too nearly to be altogether agreeable."

"The passage is truly quoted, Nicholas," observed Mistress Nutter, with a cold smile. "I perfectly remember it. Master Potts seems to have the 'Dæmonologie' at his fingers' ends."

"I have made it my study, Madam," replied the lawyer, somewhat mollified by the remark, "as I have the statute on witchcraft, and indeed most other statutes."

"We have wasted time enough in this unprofitable talk," said Mistress Nutter, abruptly quitting them without bestowing the slightest salutation on Potts.

"I was but jesting in what I said just now, good Master Nicholas," observed the little lawyer, nowise disconcerted at the slight; "though they were the king's exact words I quoted. No one would suspect you of being a wizard — ha! — ha! But I am resolved to prosecute the search, and I calculate upon your aid, and that of Master Richard Assheton, who goes with us."

"You shall have mine, at all events, Master Potts," replied Nicholas; "and I doubt not, my cousin Dick's, too."

"Our May Queen, Alizon Device, is Mother Demdike's grand-daughter, is she not?" asked Potts, after a moment's reflection.

"Ay, why do you ask?" demanded Nicholas.

"For a good and sufficing reason," replied Potts. "She might be an important witness, for, as King James saith, 'bairns or wives may, of our law, serve for sufficient witnesses and proofs.' And he goeth on to say, 'For who but witches can be proofs, and so witnesses of the doings of witches.'"

"You do not mean to aver that Alizon Device is a witch, Sir?" cried Nicholas, sharply.

"I aver nothing," replied Potts; "but, as a relative of a suspected witch, she will be the best witness against her."

"If you design to meddle with Alizon Device, expect no assistance from me, Master Potts," said Nicholas, sternly, "but rather the contrary."

"Nay, I but threw out the hint, good Master Nicholas," replied Potts. "Another witness will do equally well. There are other children, no doubt. I rely on you, Sir, I rely on you. I shall now go in search of Master Nowell, and obtain the warrant and the constable."

"And I shall go keep my appointment with Parson Dewhurst, at the Abbey," said Nicholas, bowing slightly to the attorney, and taking his departure.

"It will not do to alarm him at present," said Potts, looking after him, "but I'll have that girl as a witness, and I know how to terrify her into compliance. A singular woman, that Mistress Alice Nutter. I must inquire into her history. Odd, how obstinately she set her face against witchcraft. And yet she lives at Rough Lee, in the very heart of a witch district, for such Master Nicholas Assheton calls this Pendle Forest. I shouldn't wonder if she has dealings with the old hags she de fends — Mother Demdike, and Mother Chattox. Chattox! Lord bless us, what a name! — There's cauldron and broomstick in the very sound! And Demdike is little better. Both seem of diabolical invention. If I can unearth a pack of witches, I shall gain much credit from my honourable good lords the judges of assize in these northern parts, besides pleasing the King himself, who is sure to hear of it, and reward my praiseworthy zeal. Look to yourself, Mistress Nutter, and take care you are not caught tripping. And now, for Master Roger Nowell."

With this, he peered about among the crowd in search of the magistrate, but though he thrust his little turned-up nose

in every direction, he could not find him, and therefore set out for the Abbey, concluding he had gone thither.

As Mistress Nutter walked along, she perceived James Device among the crowd, holding Jennet by the hand, and motioned him to come to her. Jem instantly understood the sign, and quitting his little sister, drew near.

"Tell thy mother," said Mistress Nutter, in a tone calculated only for his hearing, "to come to me, at the Abbey, quickly and secretly. I shall be in the ruins of the old convent church. I have somewhat to say to her, that concerns herself as well as me. Thou wilt have to go to Rough Lee and Malkin Tower to-night."

Jem nodded, to show his perfect apprehension of what was said and his assent to it, and while Mistress Nutter moved on with a slow and dignified step, he returned to Jennet, and told her she must go home directly, a piece of intelligence which was not received very graciously by the little maiden; but nothing heeding her unwillingness, Jem walked her off quickly in the direction of the cottage; but while on the way to it, they accidentally encountered their mother, Elizabeth Device, and therefore stopped.

"Yo mun go up to th' abbey, directly, mother," said Jem, with a wink, "Mistress Nutter wishes to see ye. Yo'n find her i' t' ruins o' t' owd convent church. Tak kere yo're neaw seen. Yo onderstond."

"Yeigh," replied Elizabeth, nodding her head significantly, "ey'n go at wonst, an see efter Alizon ot t' same time. Fo ey'm towd hoo has fainted, an been taen to th' Abbey by Lady Assheton."

"Never heed Alizon," replied Jem, gruffly. "Hoo's i' good hands. Ye munna be seen, ey tell ye. Ey'm going to Malkin Tower to-neet, if yo'n owt to send."

"To-neet, Jem," echoed little Jennet.

"Eigh," rejoined Jem, sharply. "Howd te tongue, wench. Dunna lose time, mother."

And as he and his little sister persued their way to the cottage, Elizabeth hobbled off towards the Abbey, muttering, as she went, "I hope Alizon an Mistress Nutter winna meet. Nah that it matters, boh still it 's better not. Strange, the wench should ha' fainted. Boh she 's always foolish an timmersome, an ey half fear has lost her heart to young Richard Assheton. Ey'n watch her narrowly, an if it turn out to be so, she mun be cured, or he secured — ha! ha!"

And muttering in this way, she passed through the abbey gateway, the wicket being left open, and proceeded towards the ruinous convent church, taking care as much as possible to avoid observation.

CHAPTER V.

Mother Chattox.

Not far from the green where the May Day revels were held, stood the ancient parish church of Whalley, its square tower surmounted with a flag-staff and banner, and shaking with the joyous peals of the ringers. A picturesque and beautiful structure it was, though full of architectural incongruities, and its gray walls and hoary buttresses, with the lancet-shaped windows of the choir, and the ramified tracery of the fine eastern window, could not fail to please any taste not quite so critical as to require absolute harmony and perfection in a building. Parts of the venerable fabric were older than the Abbey itself, dating back as far as the eleventh century, when a chapel occupied the site, and though many alterations had been made in the subsequent structure at various times, and many beauties destroyed, especially during the period of the Reformation, enough of its pristine

character remained to render it a very good specimen of an old country church. Internally, the cylindrical columns of the north aisle, the construction of the choir, and the three stone seats supported on rounded columns near the altar, proclaimed its high antiquity. Within the choir were preserved the eighteen richly-carved stalls once occupying a similar position in the desecrated conventual church; and though exquisite in themselves, they seemed here sadly out of place, not being proportionate to the structure. Their elaborately-carved seats projected far into the body of the church, and their crocketed pinnacles shot up almost to the ceiling. But it was well they had not shared the destruction in which almost all the other ornaments of the magnificent fane they once decorated were involved. Carefully preserved, the black varnished oak well displayed the quaint and grotesque designs with which many of them — the Prior's stall in especial — were embellished. Chief among them was the abbot's stall, festooned with sculptured vine wreaths and clustering grapes, and bearing the auspicious inscription:

Semper gaudentes sint ista sede sedentes:

singularly inapplicable, however, to the last prelate who filled it. Some fine old monuments, and warlike trophies of neighbouring wealthy families, adorned the walls, and within the nave was a magnificent pew, with a canopy and pillars of elaborately-carved oak, and lattice-work at the sides, allotted to the manor of Read, and recently erected by Roger Nowell; while in the north and south aisles, were two small chapels, converted since the reformed faith had obtained, into pews — the one, called Saint Mary's Cage, belonging to the Assheton family; and the other, appertaining to the Catterals, of Little Mitton, and designated Saint Nicholas's Cage. Under the

last-named chapel were interred some of the Paslews of Wiswall, and here lay the last unfortunate Abbot of Whalley, between whose grave, and the Assheton and Braddyll families, a fatal relation was supposed to subsist. Another large pew, allotted to the Towneleys, and designated Saint Anthony's Cage, was rendered remarkable, by a characteristic speech of Sir John Towneley, which gave much offence to the neighbouring dames. Called upon to decide as to the position of the sittings in the church, the discourteous knight made choice of Saint Anthony's Cage, already mentioned, declaring, "My man Shuttleworth, of Hacking, made this form, and here will I sit when I come, and my cousin Nowell may make a seat behind me if he please, and my son Sherburne shall make one on the other side, and Master Catteral another behind him, and for the residue the use shall be, first come first speed, and that will make the proud wives of Whalley rise betimes to come to church." One can fancy the rough knight's chuckle, as he addressed these words to the old clerk, certain of their being quickly repeated to the "proud wives" in question.

Within the church-yard grew two fine old yew trees, now long since decayed and gone, but then spreading their dark green arms over the little turf-covered graves. Reared against the buttresses of the church was an old stone coffin, together with a fragment of a curious monumental effigy, likewise of stone; but the most striking objects in the place, and deservedly ranked amongst the wonders of Whalley, were three remarkable obelisk-shaped crosses, set in a line upon pedestals, covered with singular devices in fretwork, and all three differing in size and design. Evidently of remotest antiquity, these crosses were traditionally assigned to Paullinus, who, according to the Venerable Bede, first preached the Gospel in these parts, in the early part of the

seventh century; but other legends were attached to them by the vulgar, and dim mystery brooded over them.

Vestiges of another people and another faith were likewise here discernible, for where the Saxon forefathers of the village prayed and slumbered in death, the Roman invaders of the isle had trodden and perchance performed their religious rites; some traces of an encampment being found in the church-yard by the historian of the spot, while the north boundary of the hallowed precincts was formed by a deep foss, once encompassing the nigh-obliterated fortification. Besides these records of an elder people, there was another memento of by-gone days and creeds in a little hermitage and chapel adjoining it, founded in the reign of Edward III., by Henry, Duke of Lancaster, for the support of two recluses and a priest to say masses daily for him and his descendants; but this pious bequest being grievously abused in the subsequent reign of Henry VI., by Isole de Heton, a fair widow, who in the first transports of grief, vowing herself to Heaven, took up her abode in the hermitage, and led a very disorderly life therein, to the great scandal of the abbey, and the great prejudice of the morals of its brethren, and at last, tired even of the slight restraint imposed upon her, fled away "contrary to her oath and profession, not willing, nor intending to be restored again;" the hermitage was dissolved by the pious monarch, and masses ordered to be said daily in the parish church for the repose of the soul of the founder. Such was the legend attached to the little cell, and tradition went on to say that the anchoress broke her leg in crossing Whalley Nab, and limped ever afterwards; a just judgment on such a heinous offender. Both these little structures were picturesque objects, being overgrown with ivy and woodbine. The chapel was completely in ruins, while the cell, profaned by the misdoings of the dissolute votaress Isole, had been

converted into a cage for vagrants and offenders, and made secure by a grated window, and a strong door studded with broad-headed nails.

The view from the church-yard, embracing the vicarage-house, a comfortable residence, surrounded by a large walled-in garden, well stocked with fruit trees, and sheltered by a fine grove of rook-haunted timber, extended on the one hand over the village, and on the other over the Abbey, and was bounded by the towering and well-wooded heights of Whalley Nab. On the side of the Abbey, the most conspicuous objects were the great north-eastern gateway with the ruined conventual church. Ever beautiful, the view was especially so on the present occasion, from the animated scene combined with it; and the pleasant prospect was enjoyed by a large assemblage, who had adjourned thither to witness the concluding part of the festival.

Within the green and flower-decked bowers which, as has before been mentioned, were erected in the church-yard, were seated Doctor Ormerod, and Sir Ralph Assheton, with such of their respective guests as had not already retired, including Richard and Nicholas Assheton, both of whom had returned from the Abbey; the former having been dismissed by Lady Assheton from further attendance upon Alizon, and the latter having concluded his discourse with Parson Dewhurst, who, indeed, accompanied him to the church, and was now placed between the Vicar and the Rector of Middleton. From this gentle elevation the gay company on the green could be fully discerned, the tall May Pole, with its garlands and ribands, forming a pivot, about which the throng ever revolved, while stationary amidst the moving masses, the rush-cart reared on high its broad green back, as if to resist the living waves constantly dashed against it. By-and-by a new kind of movement was perceptible, and it

soon became evident that a procession was being formed. Immediately afterwards the rush-cart was put in motion, and winded slowly along the narrow street leading to the church, preceded by the morris-dancers and the other May Day revellers, and followed by a great concourse of people, shouting, dancing, and singing.

On came the crowd. The jingling of bells, and the sound of music grew louder and louder, and the procession, lost for awhile behind some intervening habitations, though the men bestriding the rush-cart could be discerned over their summits, burst suddenly into view; and the revellers entering the church-yard, drew up on either side of the little path leading to the porch, while the rush-cart coming up the next moment, stopped at the gate. Then four young maidens dressed in white, and having baskets in their hands, advanced and scattered flowers along the path; after which ladders were reared against the sides of the rush-cart, and the men descending from their exalted position, bore the garlands to the church, preceded by the vicar and the two other divines, and followed by Robin Hood and his band, the morris-dancers, and a troop of little children singing a hymn. The next step was to unfasten the bundles of rushes, of which the cart was composed, and this was very quickly and skilfully performed, the utmost care being taken of the trinkets and valuables with which it was ornamented. These were gathered together in baskets and conveyed to the vestry, and there locked up. This done, the bundles of rushes were taken up by several old women, who strewed the aisles with them, and placed such as had been tied up as mats in the pews. At the same time, two casks of ale set near the gate, and given for the occasion by the vicar, were broached, and their foaming contents freely distributed among the dancers and the thirsty crowd. Very merry were they, as may be supposed, in con-

sequence, but their mirth was happily kept within due limits of decorum.

When the rush-cart was well nigh unladen Richard Assheton entered the church, and greatly pleased with the effect of the flowery garlands with which the various pews were decorated, said as much to the vicar, who smilingly replied, that he was glad to find he approved of the practice, "even though it might savour of superstition;" and, as the good doctor walked away, being called forth, the young man almost unconsciously turned into the chapel on the north aisle. Here he stood for a few moments gazing round the church, wrapt in pleasing meditation, in which many objects, somewhat foreign to the place and time, passed through his mind, when, chancing to look down, he saw a small funeral wreath, of mingled yew and cypress, lying at his feet, and a slight tremor passed over his frame, as he found he was standing on the ill-omened grave of Abbot Paslew. Before he could ask himself by whom this sad garland had been so deposited, Nicholas Assheton came up to him, and with a look of great uneasiness cried "Come away instantly, Dick. Do you know where you are standing?"

"On the grave of the last Abbot of Whalley," replied Richard, smiling.

"Have you forgotten the common saying," cried Nicholas, — "that the Assheton who stands on that unlucky grave shall die within the year? Come away at once."

"It is too late," replied Richard, "I have incurred the fate, if such a fate be attached to the tomb, and as my moving away will not preserve me, so my tarrying here cannot injure me further. But I have no fear."

"You have more courage than I possess," rejoined Nicholas. "I would not set foot on that accursed stone for half the county. Its malign influence on our house has been

approved too often. The first to experience the fatal destiny were Richard Assheton and John Braddyll, the purchasers of the Abbey. Both met here together on the anniversary of the Abbot's execution— some forty years after its occurrence, it is true, and when they were both pretty well stricken in years — and within that year, namely 1578, both died, and were buried in the vault on the opposite side of the church, not many paces from their old enemy. The last instance was my poor brother Richard, who, being incredulous as you are, was resolved to brave the destiny, and stationed himself upon the tomb during divine service, but he too died within the appointed time."

"He was bewitched to death — so, at least, it is affirmed," said Richard Assheton, with a smile. "But I believe in one evil influence just as much as in the other."

"It matters not how the destiny be accomplished, so it come to pass," rejoined the squire, turning away. "Heaven shield you from it!"

"Stay!" said Richard, picking up the wreath. "Who think you can have placed this funeral garland on the Abbot's grave?"

"I cannot guess!" cried Nicholas, staring at it, in amazement — "an enemy of ours, most likely. It is neither customary nor lawful in our Protestant country so to ornament graves. Put it down, Dick."

"I shall not displace it, certainly," replied Richard, laying it down again; "but I as little think it has been placed here by a hostile hand, as I do that harm will ensue to me from standing here. To relieve your anxiety, however, I will come forth," he added, stepping into the aisle. "Why should an enemy deposit a garland on the abbot's tomb, since it was by mere chance that it hath met my eyes?"

"Mere chance!" cried Nicholas; "every thing is mere

chance with you philosophers. There is more than chance in it. My mind misgives me strangely. That terrible old Abbot Paslew is as troublesome to us in death, as he was during life to our predecessor, Richard Assheton. Not content with making his tombstone a weapon of destruction to us, he pays the Abbey itself an occasional visit, and his appearance always betides some disaster to the family. I have never seen him myself, and trust I never shall; but other people have, and have been nigh scared out of their senses by the apparition."

"Idle tales, the invention of over-heated brains," rejoined Richard. "Trust me, the abbot's rest will not be broken till the day when all shall rise from their tombs; though if ever the dead (supposing such a thing possible) could be justified in injuring and affrighting the living, it might be in his case, since he mainly owed his destruction to our ancestor. On the same principle it has been held that church-lands are unlucky to their lay-possessors, but see how this superstitious notion has been disproved in our own family, to whom Whalley Abbey and its domains have brought wealth, power, and worldly happiness."

"There is something in the notion, nevertheless," replied Nicholas, "and though our case may, I hope, continue an exception to the rule, most grantees of ecclesiastical houses have found them a curse, and the time may come when the Abbey may prove so to our descendants. But without discussing the point, there is one instance in which the malignant influence of the vindictive abbot has undoubtedly extended long after his death. You have heard, I suppose, that he pronounced a dreadful anathema upon the child of a man who had the reputation of being a wizard, and who afterwards acted as his executioner. I know not the whole particulars of the dark story, but I know that Paslew fixed a curse upon

the child, declaring it should become a witch, and the mother of witches. And the prediction has been verified. Nigh eighty years have flown by since then, and the infant still lives — a fearful and mischievous witch — and all her family are similarly fated — all are witches."

"I never heard the story before," said Richard, somewhat thoughtfully; "but I guess to whom you allude — Mother Demdike, of Pendle Forest, and her family."

"Precisely," rejoined Nicholas, "they are a brood of witches."

"In that case Alizon Device must be a witch," cried Richard; "and I think you will hardly venture upon such an assertion after what you have seen of her to-day. If she be a witch, I would there were many such — as fair and gentle. And see you not how easily the matter is explained? 'Give a dog an ill name and hang him' — a proverb with which you are familiar enough. So with Mother Demdike. Whether really uttered or not, the abbot's curse upon her and her issue has been bruited abroad, and hence she is made a witch, and her children are supposed to inherit the infamous taint. So it is with yon tomb. It is said to be dangerous to our family, and dangerous no doubt it is to those who believe in the saying, which, luckily, I do not. The prophecy works its own fulfilment. The absurdity and injustice of yielding to the opinion are manifest. No wrong can have been done the abbot by Mother Demdike, any more than by her children, and yet they are to be punished for the misdeeds of their predecessor."

"Ay, just as you and I, who are of the third and fourth generation, may be punished for the sins of our fathers," rejoined Nicholas. "You have Scripture against you, Dick. The only thing I see in favour of your argument is, the instance you allege of Alizon. She does not look like a witch,

certainly; but there is no saying. She may be only the more dangerous for her rare beauty, and apparent innocence!"

"I would answer for her truth with my life," cried Richard, quickly. "It is impossible to look at her countenance, in which candour and purity shine forth, and doubt her goodness."

"She hath cast her spells over you, Dick, that is certain," rejoined Nicholas, laughing; "but to be serious. Alizon, I admit, is an exception to the rest of the family, but that only strengthens the general rule. Did you ever remark the strange look they all — save the fair maid in question — have about the eyes?"

Richard answered in the negative.

"It is very singular, and I wonder you have not noticed it," pursued Nicholas; "but the question of reputed witchcraft in Mother Demdike has some chance of being speedily settled; for Master Potts, the little London lawyer, who goes with us to Pendle Forest to-morrow, is about to have her arrested and examined before a magistrate."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Richard, "this must be prevented."

"Why so?" exclaimed Nicholas, in surprise.

"Because the prejudice existing against her is sure to convict and destroy her," replied Richard. "Her great age, infirmities, and poverty, will be proofs against her. How can she, or any old enfeebled creature like her, whose decrepitude and misery should move compassion rather than excite fear — how can such a person defend herself against charges easily made and impossible to refute? I do not deny the possibility of witchcraft, even in our own days, though I think it of very unlikely occurrence; but I would determinately resist giving credit to any tales told by the super-

stitious vulgar, who naturally prone to cruelty, have so many motives for revenging imaginary wrongs. It is placing a dreadful weapon in their hands, of which they have cunning enough to know the use, but neither mercy nor justice enough to restrain them from using it. Better let one guilty person escape, than many innocent perish. So many undefined charges have been brought against Mother Demdike, that at last they have fixed a stigma on her name, and made her an object of dread and suspicion. She is endowed with mysterious power, which would have no effect if not believed in; and now must be burned because she is called a witch, and is doting and vain enough to accept the title."

"There is something in a witch difficult, nay, almost impossible to describe," said Nicholas, "but you cannot be mistaken about her. By her general ill course of life, by repeated acts of mischief, and by threats, followed by the consequences menaced, she becomes known. There is much mystery in the matter, not permitted human knowledge entirely to penetrate; but, as we know from the Scriptures that the sin of witchcraft did exist, and as we have no evidence that it has ceased, so it is fair to conclude, that there may be practisers of the dark offence in our own days, and such I hold to be Mother Demdike and Mother Chattox. Rival potentates in evil, they contend which shall do most michief, but it must be admitted the former bears away the bell."

"If all the ill attributed to her were really caused by her machinations, this might be correct," replied Richard, "but it only shows her to be more calumniated than the other. In a word, cousin Nicholas, I look upon them as two poor old creatures who, persuaded they really possess the supernatural power accorded to them by the vulgar, strive to act up to their parts, and are mainly assisted in doing so by the credulity and fears of their audience."

"Admitting the blind credulity of the multitude," said Nicholas, "and their proneness to discern the hand of the witch in the most trifling accidents; admitting also, their readiness to accuse any old crone unlucky enough to offend them of sorcery; I still believe that there are actual practisers of the black art, who, for a brief term of power, have entered into a league with Satan, worship him and attend his sabbaths, and have a familiar, in the shape of a cat, dog, toad, or mole, to obey their behests, transform themselves into various shapes — as a hound, horse, or hare, — raise storms of wind or hail, maim cattle, bewitch and slay human beings, and ride whither they will on broomsticks. But holding the contrary opinion, you will not, I apprehend, aid Master Potts in his quest of witches."

"I will not," rejoined Richard. "On the contrary, I will oppose him. But enough of this. Let us go forth."

And they quitted the church together.

As they issued into the church-yard, they found the principal arbours occupied by the morris-dancers, Robin Hood and his troop, Doctor Ormerod and Sir Ralph having retired to the vicarage-house.

Many merry groups were scattered about, talking, laughing, and singing; but two persons, seemingly objects of suspicion and alarm, and shunned by every one who crossed their path, were advancing slowly towards the three crosses of Paullinus, which stood in a line, not far from the church-porch. They were females, one about five-and-twenty, very comely, and habited in smart holiday attire, put on with considerable rustic coquetry, so as to display a very neat foot and ankle, and with plenty of ribands in her fine chestnut hair. The other was a very different person, far advanced in years, bent almost double, palsy-stricken, her arms and limbs shaking, her head nodding, her chin wagging, her snowy

locks hanging about her wrinkled visage, her brows and upper lip frore, and her eyes almost sightless, the pupils being cased with a thin white film. Her dress, of antiquated make, and faded stuff, had been once deep red in colour, and her old black hat was high-crowned and broad-brimmed. She partly aided herself in walking with a crutch-handled stick, and partly leaned upon her younger companion for support.

"Why, there is one of the old women we have just been speaking of — Mother Chattox," said Richard, pointing them out, "and with her, her grand-daughter, pretty Nan Redferne."

"So it is," cried Nicholas, "what makes the old hag here, I marvel! I will go question her."

So saying, he strode quickly towards her.

"How now, Mother Chattox!" he cried. "What mischief is afoot? What makes the darkness-loving owl abroad in the glare of day? What brings the grisly she-wolf from her forest lair? Back to thy den, old witch. Ar't crazed as well as blind and palsied, that thou knowest not that this is a merry-making, and not a devil's sabbath? Back to thy hut, I say! These sacred precincts are no place for thee."

"Who is it speaks to me?" demanded the old hag, halting, and fixing her glazed eyes upon him.

"One thou hast much injured," replied Nicholas. "One into whose house thou hast brought quick-wasting sickness and death by thy infernal arts. One thou hast good reason to fear, for learn to thy confusion, thou damned and murtherous witch, it is Nicholas, brother to thy victim, Richard Assheton of Downham, who speaks to thee."

"I know none I have reason to fear," replied Mother Chattox; "especially thee, Nicholas Assheton. Thy brother was no victim of mine. Thou wert the gainer by his death, not I. Why should I slay him?"

"I will tell thee why old hag," cried Nicholas; "he was inflamed by the beauty of thy grand-daughter Nancy here, and it was to please Tom Redferne, her sweetheart then, but her spouse since, that thou bewitchedst him to death"

"That reason will not avail thee, Nicholas," rejoined Mother Chattox, with a derisive laugh. "If I had any hand in his death, it was to serve and pleasure thee, and that all men shall know, if I am questioned on the subject — ha! ha! Take me to the crosses, Nance."

"Thou shalt not 'scape thus, thou murtherous hag," cried Nicholas, furiously.

"Nay, let her go her way," said Richard, who had drawn near during the colloquy. "No good will come of meddling with her."

"Who 's that?" asked Mother Chattox, quickly.

"Master Richard Assheton, o' Middleton," whispered Nan Redferne.

"Another of these accursed Asshetons," cried Mother Chattox. "A plague seize them!"

"Boh he's weel-favourt an kindly," remarked her grand-daughter.

"Well-favoured or not, kindly or cruel, I hate them all," cried Mother Chattox. "To the crosses, I say."

But Nicholas placed himself in their path.

"Is it to pray to Beelzebub, thy master, that thou wouldst go to the crosses?" he asked.

"Out of my way, pestilent fool!" cried the hag.

"Thou shalt not stir till I have had an answer," rejoined Nicholas. "They say those are Runic obelisks, and not Christian crosses, and that the carvings upon them have a magical signification. The first, it is averred, is written o'er with deadly curses, and the forms in which they are traced, as serpentine, triangular, or round, indicate and rule their

swift or slow effect. The second bears charms against diseases, storms, and lightning. And on the third is inscribed a verse which will render him who can read it rightly, invisible to mortal view. Thou shouldst be learned in such lore, old Pythoness. Is it so?"

The hag's chin wagged fearfully, and her frame trembled with passion, but she spoke not.

"Have you been in the church, old woman?" interposed Richard.

"Ay, wherefore?" she rejoined.

"Some one has placed a cypress wreath on Abbot Paslew's grave. Was it you?" he asked.

"What! hast thou found it?" cried the hag. "It shall bring thee rare luck, lâd — rare luck. Now let me pass."

"Not yet," cried Nicholas, forcibly grasping her withered arm.

The hag uttered a scream of rage.

"Let me go, Nicholas Assheton," she shrieked, "or thou shalt rue it. Cramps and aches shall wring and rack thy flesh and bones; fever shall consume thee; ague shake thee — shake thee — ha!"

And Nicholas recoiled, appalled by her fearful gestures.

"You carry your malignity too far, old woman," said Richard, severely.

"And thou darest tell me so?" cried the hag. "Set me before him, Nance, that I may curse him," she added, raising her palsied arm.

"Nah, nah — yo'n cursed ower much already, grandmother," cried Nan Redferne, endeavouring to drag her away. But the old woman resisted.

"I will teach him to cross my path," she vociferated, in accents shrill and jarring as the cry of the goat-sucker. "Handsome he is, it may be now, but he shall not be so long.

The bloom shall fade from his cheek, the fire be extinguished in his eyes, the strength depart from his limbs. Sorrow shall be her portion who loves him — sorrow and shame!"

"Horrible!" exclaimed Richard, endeavouring to exclude the voice of the crone, which pierced his ears like some sharp instrument.

"Ha! ha! you fear me now," she cried. "By this, and this, the spell shall work," she added, describing a circle in the air with her stick, then crossing it twice, and finally scattering over him a handful of grave-dust, snatched from an adjoining hillock. "Now lead me quickly to the smaller cross, Nance," she added, in a low tone.

Her grand-daughter complied, with a glance of deep commiseration at Richard, who remained stupified at the ominous proceeding.

"Ah! this must indeed be a witch!" he cried, recovering from the momentary shock.

"So you are convinced at last," rejoined Nicholas. "I can take breath now the old hell-cat is gone. But she shall not escape us. Keep an eye upon her, while I see if Simon Sparshot, the beadle, be within the church-yard, and if so he shall take her into custody, and lock her in the cage."

With this, he ran towards the throng, shouting lustily for the beadle. Presently a big, burly fellow, in a scarlet doublet, laced with gold, a black velvet cap trimmed with red ribands, yellow hose, and shoes with great roses in them, and bearing a long silver-headed staff, answered the summons, and upon being told why his services were required, immediately roared out at the top of a stentorian voice, "A witch, lads! — a witch!"

All was astir in an instant. Robin Hood and his merry men, with the morris-dancers, rushed out of their bowers, and the whole church-yard was in agitation. Above the din was heard

the loud voice of Simon Sparshot, still shouting, "A witch! — a witch! — Mother Chattox!"

"Where — where?" demanded several voices.

"Yonder," replied Nicholas, pointing to the further cross.

A general movement took place in that direction, the crowd being headed by the squire and the beadle, but when they came up, they found only Nan Redferne standing behind the obelisk.

"Where the devil is the old witch gone, Dick?" cried Nicholas, in dismay.

"I thought I saw her standing there with her granddaughter," replied Richard; "but in truth I did not watch very closely."

"Search for her — search for her," cried Nicholas.

But neither behind the crosses, nor behind any monument, nor in any hole or corner, nor on the other side of the churchyard wall, nor at the back of the little hermitage or chapel, though all were quickly examined, could the old hag be found.

On being questioned, Nan Redferne refused to say aught concerning her grandmother's flight or place of concealment.

"I begin to think there is some truth in that strange legend of the cross," said Nicholas. "Notwithstanding her blindness, the old hag must have managed to read the magic verse upon it, and so have rendered herself invisible. But we have got the young witch safe."

"Yeigh, squoire!" responded Sparshot, who had seized hold of Nance — "hoo be safe enough."

"Nan Redferne is no witch," said Richard Assheton, authoritatively.

"Neaw witch, Mester Ruchot!" cried the beadle, in amazement.

"No more than any of these lasses around us," said Richard. "Release her, Sparshot."

"I forbid him to do so, till she has been examined," cried a sharp voice. And the next moment Master Potts was seen pushing his way through the crowd, "So you have found a witch, my masters. I heard your shouts, and hurried on as fast as I could. Just in time, Master Nicholas — just in time," he added, rubbing his hands gleefully.

"Lemme go, Simon," besought Nance.

"Neaw, neaw, lass, that munnot be," rejoined Sparshot.

"Help — save me, Master Richard!" cried the young woman.

By this time the crowd had gathered round her, yelling, hooting, and shaking their hands at her, as if about to tear her in pieces; but Richard Assheton planted himself resolutely before her, and pushed back the foremost of them.

"Remove her instantly to the Abbey, Sparshot," he cried, "and let her be kept in safe custody till Sir Ralph has time to examine her. Will that content you, masters?"

"Neaw — neaw," responded several rough voices "swim her! — swim her!"

"Quite right, my worthy friends, quite right," said Potts. "*Primo*, let us make sure she is a witch — *secundo*, let us take her to the Abbey."

"There can be no doubt as to her being a witch, Master Potts," rejoined Nicholas; "her old grand-dame, Mother Chattox, has just vanished from our sight."

"Has Mother Chattox been here?" cried Potts, opening his round eyes to their widest extent.

"Not many minutes since," replied Nicholas. "In fact, she may be here still for aught I know."

"Here! — where?" cried Potts, looking round.

"You won't discover her, for all your quickness," replied

Nicholas. "She has rendered herself invisible, by reciting the magical verses inscribed on that cross."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the attorney, closely examining the mysterious inscriptions. "What strange, uncouth characters! I can make neither head nor tail, unless it be the devil's tail, of them."

At this moment, a whoop was raised by Jem Device, who, having taken his little sister home, had returned to the sports on the green, and now formed part of the assemblage in the church-yard. Between the rival witch potentates, Mothers Demdike and Chattox, it has already been said, a deadly enmity existed, and the feud was carried on with equal animosity by their descendants; and though Jem himself came under the same suspicion as Nan Redferne, that circumstance created no tie of interest between them, but the contrary, and he was the most active of her assailants. He had set up the above-mentioned cry from observing a large rat running along the side of the wall.

"Theere hoo goes," whooped Jem, "t' owd witch, i' th' shape ov a rotten! — loo-loo-loo!"

Half the crowd started in pursuit of the animal, and twenty sticks were thrown at it, but a stone cast by Jem, stayed its progress, and it was instantly despatched. It did not change, however, as was expected by the credulous hinds, into an old woman, and they gave vent to their disappointment and rage in renewed threats against Nan Redferne. The dead rat was hurled at her by Jem, but missing its mark, it hit Master Potts on the head, and nearly knocked him off the cross, upon which he had mounted to obtain a better view of the proceedings. Irritated by this circumstance, as well as by the failure of the experiment, the little attorney jumped down, and fell to kicking the unfortunate rat, after which, his fury being somewhat appeased, he turned to Nance, who had sunk for support

against the pedestal, and said to her — "If you will tell us what has become of the old witch your grandmother, and undertake to bear witness against her, you shall be set free."

"Ey'n tell ye nowt, mon," replied Nance, doggedly. "Put me to onny trial ye like, ye shanna get a word fro me."

"That remains to be seen," retorted Potts, "but I apprehend we shall make you speak, and pretty plainly too, before we've done with you. — You hear what this perverse and wrong-headed young witch declares, masters," he shouted, again clambering upon the cross. "I have offered her liberty, on condition of disclosing to us the manner of her diabolical old relative's evasion, and she rejects it."

An angry roar followed, mixed with cries, from Jem Device, of "swim her! — swim her."

"You had better tell them what you know, Nance," said Richard, in a low tone, "or I shall have difficulty in preserving you from their fury."

"Ey darena, Master Richard," she replied, shaking her head; and then she added, firmly, "Ey winna."

Finding it useless to reason with her, and fearing also that the infuriated crowd might attempt to put their threats into execution, Richard turned to his cousin Nicholas, and said: "We must get her away, or violence will be done."

"She does not deserve your compassion, Dick," replied Nicholas: "she is only a few degrees better than the old hag who has escaped. Sparshot here tells me she is noted for her skill in modelling clay figures."

"Yeigh, that hoo be," replied the broad-faced beadle; "hoo 's unaccountable cliver ot that sort o' wark. A clay figger os big so a six months' barn, fashiont i' th' likeness o' Farmer Grimble, o' Briercliffe lawnd, os died last month, war seen i' her cottage, an monny others besoide. Amongst 'em a moddle o' your lamented brother, Squoire Ruchot

Assheton o' Downham, wi' t' yeod pood off, an th' 'eart pierct thro' an' thro' wi' pins and needles."

"Ye lien i' your teeth, Simon Sparshot!" cried Nance, regarding him furiously.

"If the head were off, Simon, I don't see how the likeness to my poor brother could well be recognised," said Nicholas, with a half-smile. "But let her be put to some mild trial — weighed against the church Bible."

"Be it so," replied Potts, jumping down; "but if that fail, we must have recourse to stronger measures. Take notice that, with all her fright, she has not been able to shed a tear, not a single tear — a clear witch — a clear witch!"

"Ey'd scorn to weep fo t' like o' yo!" cried Nance, disdainfully, having now completely recovered her natural audacity.

"We 'll soon break your spirit, young woman, I can promise you," rejoined Potts.

As soon as it was known what was about to occur, the whole crowd moved towards the church-porch, Nan Redferne walking between Richard Assheton and the beadle, who kept hold of her arm to prevent any attempt at escape; and by the time they reached the appointed place, Ben Baggiley, the baker, who had been despatched for the purpose, appeared with an enormous pair of wooden scales, while Sampson Harrop, the clerk, having visited the pulpit, came forth with the church Bible, an immense volume, bound in black, with great silver clasps.

"Come, that 's a good big Bible at all events," cried Potts, eyeing it with satisfaction. "It looks like my honourable and singular good Lord Chief Justice Sir Edward Coke's learned 'Institutes of the Laws of England,' only that that great legal tome is generally bound in calf — law-calf, as we say."

"Large as the book is it will scarce prove heavy enough to

weigh down the witch, I opine," observed Nicholas, with a smile.

"We shall see, Sir," replied Potts. "We shall see."

By this time, the scales having been affixed to a hook in the porch by Baggiley, the sacred volume was placed on one side, and Nance set down by the beadle on the other. The result of the experiment was precisely what might have been anticipated — the moment the young woman took her place in the balance, it sank down to the ground, while the other kicked the beam.

"I hope you are satisfied now, Master Potts," cried Richard Assheton. "By your own trial her innocence is approved."

"Your pardon, Master Richard, this is Squire Nicholas's trial, not mine," replied Potts. "I am for the ordeal of swimming. How say you, masters! Shall we be content with this doubtful experiment?"

"Neaw — neaw," responded Jem Device, who acted as spokesman to the crowd, "swim her — swim her."

"I knew you would have it so," said Potts, approvingly. "Where is a fitting place for the trial?"

"Th' Abbey pool is nah fur off," replied Jem, "or ye con tay her to th' Calder."

"The river, by all means — nothing like a running stream," said Potts. "Let cords be procured to bind her."

"Run fo 'em quickly, Ben," said Jem to Baggiley, who was very zealous in the cause.

"Oh!" groaned Nance, again losing courage, and glancing piteously at Richard.

"No outrage like this shall be perpetrated," cried the young man, firmly; "I call upon you, cousin Nicholas, to help me. Go into the church," he added, thrusting Nance backward, and presenting his sword at the breast of Jem Device,

who attempted to follow her, and who retired muttering threats and curses. "I will run the first man through the body who attempts to pass."

As Nan Redferne made good her retreat, and shut the church-door after her, Master Potts, pale with rage, cried out to Richard, "You have aided the escape of a desperate and notorious offender — actually in custody, Sir, and have rendered yourself liable to indictment for it, Sir, with consequences of fine and imprisonment, Sir — heavy fine and long imprisonment, Sir. Do you mark me, Master Richard?"

"I will answer the consequences of my act to those empowered to question it, Sir," replied Richard, sternly.

"Well, Sir, I have given you notice," rejoined Potts, "due notice. We shall hear what Sir Ralph will say to the matter, and Master Roger Nowell, and —"

"You forget me, good Master Potts," interrupted Nicholas, laughingly; "I entirely disapprove of it. It is a most flagrant breach of duty. Nevertheless, I am glad the poor wench has got off."

"She is safe within the church," said Potts, "and I command Master Richard, in the king's name, to let us pass. Beadle! Sharpshot, Sparshot, or whatever be your confounded name, do your duty, sirrah. Enter the church, and bring forth the witch."

"Ey darna, mester," replied Simon, "young mester Ruchot ud slit mey weasand os soon os look ot meh."

Richard put an end to further altercation, by stepping back quickly, locking the door, and then taking out the key, and putting it into his pocket.

"She is quite safe now," he cried, with a smile at the discomfited lawyer.

"Is there no other door?" inquired Potts of the beadle, in a low tone.

"Yeigh, theere been one ot t'other soide," replied Sparshot, "boh it be locked, ey reckon, an maybe hoo'n getten out that way."

"Quick, quick, and let 's see," cried Potts, "justice must not be thwarted in this shameful manner."

While the greater part of the crowd set off after Potts and the beadle, Richard Assheton, anxious to know what had become of the fugitive, and determined not to abandon her while any danger existed, unlocked the church door, and entered the holy structure, followed by Nicholas. On looking around, Nance was nowhere to be seen, neither did she answer to his repeated calls, and Richard concluded she must have escaped, when all at once a loud exulting shout was heard without, leaving no donbt that the poor young woman had again fallen into the hands of her captors. The next moment a sharp, piercing scream in a female key confirmed the supposition. On hearing this cry, Richard instantly flew to the opposite door, through which Nance must have passed, but on trying it he found it fastened outside, and filled with sudden misgiving, for he now recollected leaving the key in the other door, he called to Nicholas to come with him, and hurried back to it. His apprehensions were verified; the door was locked. At first Nicholas was inclined to laugh at the trick played them; but a single look from Richard checked his tendency to merriment, and he followed his young relative, who had sprung to a window looking upon that part of the churchyard whence the shouts came, and flung it open. Richard's egress, however, was prevented by an iron bar, and he called out loudly and fiercely to the beadle, whom he saw standing in the midst of the crowd, to unlock the door.

"Have a little patience, good Master Richard," replied Potts, turning up his provoking little visage, now charged with triumphant malice. "You shall come out presently. We

are busy just now — engaged in binding the witch, as you see. Both keys are safely in my pocket, and I will send you one of them when we start for the river, good Master Richard. We lawyers are not to be overreached you see — ha! ha!"

"You shall repent this conduct when I do get out," cried Richard, furiously. "Sparshot, I command you to bring the key instantly."

But, encouraged by the attorney, the beadle affected not to hear Richard's angry vociferations, and the others were unable to aid the young man, if they had been so disposed, and all were too much interested in what was going forward to run off to the vicarage, and acquaint Sir Ralph with the circumstances in which his relatives were placed, even though enjoined to do so.

On being set free by Richard, Nance had flown quickly through the church, and passed out at the side door, and was making good her retreat at the back of the edifice, when her flying figure was descried by Jem Device, who, failing in his first attempt, had run round that way, fancying he should catch her.

He instantly dashed after her with all the fury of a blood-hound, and being possessed of remarkable activity, speedily overtook her, and, heedless of her threats and entreaties, secured her.

"Lemme go, Jem," she cried, "an ey win do thee a good turn one o' these days, when theaw may chonce to be i' th' same strait os me." But seeing him inexorable, she added, "My grand-dame shan rack thy boans, sorely, lad, for this."

Jem replied by a coarse laugh of defiance, and dragging her along, delivered her to Master Potts and the beadle, who were then hurrying to the other door of the church. To prevent interruption, the cunning attorney, having ascertained that the two Asshetons were inside, instantly gave orders to

have both doors locked, and the injunctions being promptly obeyed, he took possession of the keys himself, chuckling at the success of the stratagem. "A fair reprisal," he muttered; "this young milksop shall find he is no match for a skilful lawyer like me. Now, the cords — the cords!"

It was at sight of the bonds, which were quickly brought by Baggiley, that Nance uttered the piercing cry that had roused Richard's indignation. Feeling secure of his prisoner, and now no longer apprehensive of interruption, Master Potts was in no hurry to conclude the arrangements, but rather prolonged them to exasperate Richard. Little consideration was shown the unfortunate captive. The new shoes and stockings of which she had been so vain a short time before, were torn from her feet and limbs by the rude hands of the remorseless Jem and the beadle, and bent down by the main force of these two strong men, her thumbs and great toes were tightly bound together, crosswise, by the cords. The church-yard rang with her shrieks, and with his blood boiling with indignation at the sight, Richard redoubled his exertions to burst through the window and fly to her assistance. But, though Nicholas now lent his powerful aid to the task, their combined efforts to obtain liberation were unavailing; and with rage almost amounting to frenzy, Richard beheld the poor young woman borne shrieking away by her captors. Nor was Nicholas much less incensed, and he swore a deep oath when he did get at liberty that Master Potts should pay dearly for his rascally conduct.

CHAPTER VI.

The ordeal by swimming.

Bound hand and foot in the painful posture before-described, roughly and insolently handled on all sides, in peril of her life from the frightful ordeal to which she was about to be subjected, the miserable captive was borne along on the shoulders of Jem Device and Sparshot, her long, fine chestnut hair trailing upon the ground, her white shoulders exposed to the insolent gaze of the crowd, and her trim holiday attire torn to rags by the rough treatment she had experienced Nance Redferne, it has been said, was a very comely young woman; but neither her beauty, her youth, nor her sex, had any effect upon the ferocious crowd, who were too much accustomed to such brutal and debasing exhibitions to feel any thing but savage delight in the spectacle of a fellow-creature so scandalously treated and tormented, and the only excuse to be offered for their barbarity is the firm belief they entertained that they were dealing with a witch. And when even in our own day so many revolting scenes are enacted to gratify the brutal passions of the mob, while prize-fights are tolerated, and wretched animals goaded on to tear each other in pieces, it is not to be wondered at that in times of less enlightenment and refinement, greater cruelties should be practised. Indeed, it may be well to consider how far we have really advanced in civilisation since then; for until cruelty, whether to man or beast, be wholly banished from our sports, we cannot justly reproach our ancestors, or congratulate ourselves on our improvement.

Nance's cries of distress were only answered by jeers, and renewed insults, and wearied out at length, the poor creature ceased struggling and shrieking, the dogged resolution she had before exhibited again coming to her aid.

But her fortitude was to be yet more severely tested. Revealed by the disorder of her habiliments, and contrasting strongly with the extreme whiteness of her skin, a dun-coloured mole was discovered upon her breast. It was pointed out to Potts by Jem Device, who declared it to be a witch-mark, and the spot where her familiar drained her blood.

"This is one of the 'good helps' to the discovery of a witch, pointed out by our sovereign lord the king," said the attorney, narrowly examining the spot. "'The one,' saith our wise prince, 'is the finding of their mark, and the trying the insensibleness thereof. The other is their fleeting on the water.' The water-ordeal will come presently, but the insensibility of the mark might be at once attested."

"Yeigh, that con soon be tried," cried Jem, with a savage laugh.

And taking a pin from his sleeve, the ruffian plunged it deeply into the poor creature's flesh. Nance winced, but she set her teeth hardly, and repressed the cry that must otherwise have been wrung from her.

"A clear witch!" cried Jem, drawing forth the pin; "not a drop o' blood flows, an hoo feels nowt!"

"Feel nowt?" rejoined Nance, between her ground teeth. "May ye ha a pang os sharp i' your cancart eart, ye villain."

After this barbarous test, the crowd, confirmed by it in their notions of Nan's guiltiness, hurried on, their numbers increasing as they proceeded along the main street of the village leading towards the river; all the villagers left at home rushing forth on hearing a witch was about to be swum, and when they came within a bow-shot of the stream, Sparshot called to Baggiley to lay hold of Nance, while he himself, accompanied by several of the crowd, ran over the bridge, the part he had to enact requiring him to be on the other side of the water.

Meantime, the main party turned down a little footpath protected by a gate on the left, which led between garden hedges to the grassy banks of the Calder, and in taking this course they passed by the cottage of Elizabeth Device. Hearing the shouts of the rabble, little Jennet, who had been in no very happy frame of mind since she had been brought home, came forth, and seeing her brother, called out to him, in her usual sharp tones, "What 's the matter, Jem? Who han ye getten there?"

"A witch," replied Jem, gruffly. "Nance Redferne, Mother Chattox's grand-daughter. Come an see her swum i' th' Calder."

Jennet readily complied, for her curiosity was aroused, and she shared in the family feelings of dislike to Mother Chattox and her descendants.

"Is this Nance Redferne?" she cried, keeping close to her brother. "Ey'm glad yo'n caught her at last. How dun ye find yersel, Nance?"

"Ill at ease, Jennet," replied Nance, with a bitter look; "boh it ill becomes ye to jeer me, lass, seein' yo're a born witch yoursel."

"Aha!" cried Potts, looking at the little girl, "So this is a born witch — eh, Nance?"

"A born an' bred witch," rejoined Nance; "jist as her brother Jem here is a wizard. They 're the granchilder o' Mother Demdike o' Pendle, the greatest witch i' these parts, an' childer o' Bess Device, who 's nah much better. Ask me to witness agen 'em, that 's aw."

"Howd thy tongue, woman, or ey'n drown thee," muttered Jem, in a tone of deep menace.

"Ye canna, mon, if ey'm the witch ye ca' me," rejoined Nance. "Jennet's turn 'll come os weel os mine, one o' these days. Mark my words."

"Efore that ey shan see ye burned, ye faggot," cried Jennet, almost fiercely.

"Ye 'n getten the fiend's mark o' your sleeve," cried Nance. "Ey see it written i' letters ov blood."

"That 's where our cat scratted me," replied Jennet, hiding her arm quickly.

"Good! — very good!" observed Potts, rubbing his hands. "'Who but witches can be proof against witches,' saith our sagacious sovereign. I shall make something of this girl. She seems a remarkably quick child — remarkably quick — ha, ha!"

By this time, the party having gained the broad flat mead through which the Calder flowed, took their way quickly towards its banks, the spot selected for the ordeal lying about fifty yards above the weir, where the current, ordinarily rapid, was checked by the dam, offering a smooth surface, with considerable depth of water. If soft natural beauties could have subdued the hearts of those engaged in this cruel and wicked experiment, never was scene better calculated for the purpose than that under contemplation. Through a lovely green valley meandered the Calder, now winding round some verdant knoll, now washing the base of lofty heights feathered with timber to their very summits, now lost amid thick woods and only discernible at intervals by a glimmer amongst the trees. Immediately in front of the assemblage rose Whalley Nab, its steep sides and brow partially covered with timber, with green patches in the uplands where sheep and cattle fed. Just below the spot where the crowd were collected, the stream, here of some width, passed over the weir, and swept in a foaming cascade over the huge stones supporting the dam, giving the rushing current the semblance and almost the beauty of a natural waterfall. Below this the stream ran brawling on in a wider but shallower channel, making pleasant

music as it went, and leaving many dry beds of sand and gravel in the midst; while a hundred yards lower down, it was crossed by the arches of the bridge. Further still, a row of tall cypresses lined the bank of the river, and screened that part of the Abbey, converted into a residence by the Asshetons; and after this, came the ruins of the refectory, the cloisters, the dormitory, the conventual church, and other parts of the venerable structure overshadowed by noble lime trees and elms. Lovelier or more peaceful scene could not be imagined. The green meads, the bright clear stream, with its white foaming weir, the woody heights reflected in the glassy waters, the picturesque old bridge, and the dark gray ruins beyond it, all might have engaged the attention, and melted the heart. Then the hour, when evening was coming on, and when each beautiful object deriving new beauty from the medium through which it was viewed, exercised a softening influence, and awakened kindly emotions. To most the scene was familiar, and therefore could have no charm of novelty. To Potts, however, it was altogether new, but he was susceptible of few gentle impressions, and neither the tender beauty of the evening, nor the wooing loveliness of the spot, awakened any responsive emotion in his breast. He was dead to every thing except the ruthless experiment about to be made.

Almost at the same time that Jem Device and his party reached the near bank of the stream, the beadle and the others appeared on the opposite side. Little was said, but instant preparations were made for the ordeal. Two long coils of rope having been brought by Baggiley, one of them was made fast to the right arm of the victim, and the other to the left; and this done, Jem Device, shouting to Sparshot to look out, flung one coil of rope across the river, where it was caught with much dexterity by the beadle. The assemblage then

spread out on the bank, while Jem, taking the poor young woman in his arms, who neither spoke nor struggled, but held her breath tightly, approached the river.

"Dunna drown her, Jem," said Jennet, who had turned very pale.

"Be quiet, wench," rejoined Jem, gruffly.

And without bestowing further attention upon her, he let down his burden carefully into the water; and this achieved, he called out to the beadle, who drew her slowly towards him, while Jem guided her with the other rope.

The crowd watched the experiment for a few moments in profound silence, but as the poor young woman, who had now reached the centre of the stream, still floated, being supported either by the tension of the cords or by her woollen apparel, a loud shout was raised that she could not sink, and was, therefore, an undeniable witch.

"Steady, lads, steady a moment," cried Potts, enchanted with the success of the experiment, "leave her where she is, that her buoyancy may be fully attested. You know, masters," he cried, with a loud voice, "the meaning of this water-ordeal. Our sovereign lord and master the king, in his wisdom, hath graciously vouchsafed to explain the matter thus: 'Water,' he saith, 'shall refuse to receive them (meaning witches of course) in her bosom, that have shaken off their sacred water of baptism, and wilfully refused the benefit thereof.' It is manifest, you see, that this diabolical young woman hath renounced her baptism, for the water rejecteth her. *Non potest mergi*, as Pliny saith. She floats like a cork, or as if the clear water of the Calder had suddenly become like the slab, salt waves of the Dead Sea, in which nothing can sink. You behold the marvel with your own eyes, my masters."

"Ay, ay!" rejoined Baggiley and several others.

"Hoo be a witch fo sartin," cried Jem Device. But as he

spoke, chancing slightly to slacken the rope, the tension of which maintained the equilibrium of the body, the poor woman instantly sank.

A groan, as much of disappointment as sympathy, broke from the spectators, but none attempted to aid her; and on seeing her sink, Jem abandoned the rope altogether.

But assistance was at hand. Two persons rushed quickly and furiously to the spot. They were Richard and Nicholas Assheton. The iron bar had at length yielded to their efforts, and the first use they made of their freedom was to hurry to the river. A glance showed them what had occurred, and the younger Assheton, unhesitatingly plunging into the water, seized the rope dropped by Jem, and calling to the beadle to let go his hold, dragged forth the poor half-drowned young woman, and placed her on the bank, hewing asunder the cords that bound her hands and feet with his sword. But though still sensible, Nance was so much exhausted by the shock she had undergone, and her muscles were so severely strained by the painful and unnatural posture to which she had been compelled, that she was wholly unable to move. Her thumbs were blackened and swollen, and the cords had cut into the flesh, while blood trickled down from the puncture in her breast. Fixing a look of inexpressible gratitude upon her preserver, she made an effort to speak, but the exertion was too great; violent hysterical sobbing came on, and her senses soon after forsook her. Richard called loudly for assistance, and the sentiments of the most humane part of the crowd having undergone a change since the failure of the ordeal, some females came forward, and took steps for her restoration. Sensibility having returned, a cloak was wrapped around her, and she was conveyed to a neighbouring cottage and put to bed, where her stiffened limbs were chafed, and

warm drinks administered, and it began to be hoped that no serious consequences would ensue.

Meanwhile, a catastrophe had well-nigh occurred in another quarter. With eyes flashing with fury, Nicholas Assheton pushed aside the crowd, and made his way to the bank whereon Master Potts stood. Not liking his looks, the little attorney would have taken to his heels, but finding escape impossible, he called upon Baggiley to protect him. But he was instantly in the forcible gripe of the squire, who shouted, "I'll teach you, mongrel hound, to play tricks with gentlemen."

"Master Nicholas," cried the terrified and half-strangled attorney, "my very good Sir, I entreat you to let me alone. This is a breach of the king's peace Sir. Assault and battery, under aggravated circumstances, and punishable with ignominious corporal penalties, besides fine and imprisonment, Sir. I take you to witness the assault, Master Baggiley. I shall bring my ac—ac—ah—o—o—oh!"

"Then you shall have something to bring your ac—ac—action for, rascal," cried Nicholas. And seizing the attorney by the nape of the neck with one hand, and the hind wings of his doublet with the other, he cast him to a considerable distance into the river, where he fell with a tremendous splash.

"He is no wizard, at all events," laughed Nicholas, as Potts went down like a lump of lead.

But the attorney was not born to be drowned; at least, at this period of his career. On rising to the surface, a few seconds after his immersion, he roared lustily for help, but would infallibly have been carried over the weir, if Jem Device had not flung him the rope now disengaged from Nance Redferne, and which he succeeded in catching. In this way he was dragged out; and as he crept up the bank, with the wet

pouring from his apparel, which now clung tightly to his lathy limbs, he was greeted by the jeers of Nicholas.

"How like you the water-ordeal — eh, Master Attorney? No occasion for a second trial, I think. If Jem Device had known his own interest, he would have left you to fatten the Calder eels; but he will find it out in time."

"You will find it out too, Master Nicholas," rejoined Potts, clapping on his wet cap. "Take me to the Dragon, quickly, good fellow," he added, to Jem Device, "and I will recompense thee for thy pains, as well as for the service thou hast just rendered me. I shall have rheumatism in my joints, pains in my loins, and rheum in my head, oh dear—oh dear!"

"In which case you will not be able to pay Mother Demdike your purposed visit to-morrow," jeered Nicholas. "You forget you were to arrest her, and bring her before a magistrate."

"Thy arm, good fellow, thy arm!" said Potts, to Jem Device.

"To the fiend, wi' thee," cried Jem, shaking him off, roughly. "The squoire is reet. Wouldee had let thee drown."

"What, have you changed your mind already, Jem?" cried Nicholas, in a taunting tone. "You'll have your grandmother's thanks for the service you've rendered her, lad — ha! ha!"

"Fo' t' matter o' two pins ey'd pitch him again," growled Jem, eyeing the attorney askance.

"No, no, Jem," observed Nicholas, "things must take their course. What 's done is done. But if Master Potts be wise, he'll take himself out of court without delay."

"You'll be glad to get me out of court one of these days, squire," muttered Potts, "and so will you too, Master James Device. A day of reckoning will come for both — heavy

reckoning. Ugh! ugh!" he added, shivering, "how my teeth chatter!"

"Make what haste you can to the Dragon," cried the good-natured squire; "get your clothes dried, and bid John Lawe brew you a pottle of strong sack, swallow it scalding hot, and you'll never look behind you."

"Nor before me either," retorted Potts. "Scalding sack! This blood-thirsty squire has a new design upon my life!"

"Ey'n go wi' ye to th' Dragon, mester," said Baggiley; "lean o' me."

"Thanke'e, friend," replied Potts, taking his arm. "A word at parting, Master Nicholas. This is not the only discovery of witchcraft I 've made. I 've another case, somewhat nearer home. Ha! ha!"

With this, he hobbled off in the direction of the alehouse, his steps being traceable along the dusty road like the course of a watering-cart.

"Ey'n go efter him," growled Jem.

"No you won't lad," rejoined Nicholas, "and if you'll take my advice, you'll get out of Whalley as fast as you can. You will be safer on the heath of Pendle than here, when Sir Ralph and Master Roger Nowell come to know what has taken place. And mind this, sirrah — the hounds will be out in the forest to-morrow. D'ye heed?"

Jem growled something in reply, and seizing his little sister's hand, strode off with her towards his mother's dwelling, uttering not a word by the way.

Having seen Nance Redferne conveyed to the cottage, as before-mentioned, Richard Assheton, regardless of the wet state of his own apparel, now joined his cousin, the squire, and they walked to the Abbey together, conversing on what had taken place, while the crowd dispersed, some returning to the bowers in the church-yard, and others to the green, their

merriment in nowise damped by the recent occurrences, which they looked upon as part of the day's sport. As some of them passed by, laughing, singing, and dancing, Richard Assheton remarked, "I can scarcely believe these to be the same people I so lately saw in the church-yard. They then seemed totally devoid of humanity."

"Pshaw! they are humane enough," rejoined Nicholas; "but you canot expect them to show mercy to a witch, any more than to a wolf, or other savage and devouring beast."

"But the means taken to prove her guilt were as absurd as iniquitous," said Richard, "and savour of the barbarous ages. If she had perished, all concerned in the trial would have been guilty of murder."

"But no judge would condemn them," returned Nicholas; "and they have the highest authority in the realm to uphold them. As to leniency to witches, in a general way, I would show none. Traitors alike to God and man, and bond slaves of Satan, they are out of the pale of Christian charity."

"No criminal, however great, is out of the pale of Christian charity," replied Richard; "but such scenes as we have just witnessed are a disgrace to humanity, and a mockery of justice. In seeking to discover and punish one offence a greater is committed. Suppose this poor young woman really guilty — what then? Our laws are made for protection, as well as punishment of wrong. She should be arraigned, convicted, and condemned before punishment."

"Our laws admit of torture, Richard," observed Nicholas.

"True," said the young man, with a shudder, and it is another relic of a ruthless age. But torture is only allowed under the eye of the law, and can be inflicted by none but its sworn servants. But, supposing this poor young woman innocent of the crime imputed to her, which I really believe

her to be, how, then, will you excuse the atrocities to which she has been subjected?"

"I do not believe her innocent," rejoined Nicholas; "her relationship to a notorious witch, and her fabrication of clay images make her justly suspected."

"Then let her be examined by a magistrate," said Richard; "but, even then, wo betide her! When I think that Alizon Device is liable to the same atrocious treatment, in consequence of her relationship to Mother Demdike, I can scarce contain my indignation."

"It is unlucky for her, indeed," rejoined Nicholas; "but of all Nance's assailants the most infuriated was Alizon's brother, Jem Device."

"I saw it," cried Richard — an uneasy expression passing over his countenance. "Would she could be removed from that family!"

"To what purpose?" demanded Nicholas, quickly. "Her family are more likely to be removed from her if Master Potts stay in the neighbourhood."

"Poor girl!" exclaimed Richard.

And he fell into a reverie which was not broken till they reached the Abbey.

To return to Jem Device. On reaching the cottage, the ruffian flung himself into a chair, and for a time seemed lost in reflection. At last he looked up, and said gruffly to Jennet who stood watching him, "See if mother be come whoam?"

"Eigh, eigh, ey'm here, Jem," said Elizabeth Device, opening the inner door and coming forth. "So, ye ha been swimmin' Nance Redferne, lad, eh! Ey'm glad on it — ha! ha!"

Jem gave her a significant look, upon which she motioned Jennet to withdraw, and the injunction being complied with,

though with evident reluctance, by the little girl, she closed the door upon her.

"Now, Jem, what hast got to say to me, lad, eh?" demanded Elizabeth, stepping up to him.

"Neaw great deal, mother," he replied; "boh ey keawnsel ye to look weel efter yersel. We're aw i' dawnger."

"Ey knoas it, lad, ey knoas it," replied Elizabeth; "boh fo my own pert ey'm nah afeerd. They darna touch me; an' if they dun, ey con defend mysel reet weel. Here 's a letter to thy gran-mother," she added, giving him a sealed packet. "Tak care on it."

"Fro Mistress Nutter, ey suppose?" asked Jem.

"Eigh, who else should it be from?" rejoined Elizabeth. "Your gran-mother win ha' enough to do to neet, an so win yo, too, Jem, lettin alone the walk fro here to Malkin Tower."

"Weel, gi' me mey supper, an ey'n set out," rejoined Jem. "So ye ha' seen Mistress Nutter?"

"Ey found her i' th' Abbey garden," replied Elizabeth, "an we had some tawk together, abowt th' boundary line o' th' Rough Lee estates, an other matters."

And, as she spoke, she set a cold pasty, with oat cakes, cheese, and butter, before her son, and next proceeded to draw him a jug of ale.

"What other matters dun you mean, mother?" inquired Jem, attacking the pasty. "War it owt relatin' to that little Lunnon lawyer, Mester Potts?"

"Theawst hit it, Jem," replied Elizabeth, seating herself near him. "That Potts means to visit thy gran-mother tomorrow."

"Weel!" said Jem, grimly.

"An arrest her," pursued Elizabeth.

"Easily said," laughed Jem, scornfully, "boh neaw quite so easily done."

"Nah quite, Jem," responded Elizabeth, joining in the laugh. "'Specially when th' owd dame 's prepared, as she win be now."

"Potts may set out o' that journey, boh he winna come back again," remarked Jem, in a sombre tone.

"Wait till yo'n seen your gran-mother efore ye do owt, lad," said Elizabeth.

"Ay, wait," added a voice.

"What 's that?" demanded Jem, laying down his knife and fork.

Elizabeth did not answer in words, but her significant looks were quite response enough for her son.

"Os ye win, mother," he said, in an altered tone. After a pause, employed in eating, he added, "Did Mistress Nutter put onny questions to ye about Alizon?"

"More nor enough, lad," replied Elizabeth; "fo what had ey to tell her? She praised her beauty, an said how unlike she wur to Jennet an thee, lad — ha! ha! — An wondert how ey cum to ha such a dowter, an monny other things besoide. An what could ey say to it aw, except —"

"Except what, mother?" interrupted Jem.

"Except that she wur my child just os much os Jennet an thee!"

"Humph!" exclaimed Jem.

"Humph!" echoed the voice that had previously spoken.

Jem looked at his mother, and took a long pull at the ale-jug.

"Any more messages to Malkin Tower?" he asked, getting up.

"Neaw — mother will onderstond," replied Elizabeth. "Bid her be on her guard, fo' the enemy is abroad."

"Meanin' Potts?" said Jem.

"Meaning Potts," answered the voice.

"There are strange echoes here," said Jem, looking round suspiciously.

At this moment, Tib came from under a piece of furniture, where he had apparently been lying, and rubbed himself familiarly against his legs.

"Ey needna be afeerd o' owt happenin to ye, mother," said Jem, patting the cat's back. "Tib, win tay care on yo."

"Eigh, eigh," replied Elizabeth, bending down to pat him, "he 's a trusty cat." But the ill-tempered animal would not be propitiated, but erected his back and menaced her with his claws.

"Yo han offended him, mother," said Jem. "One word efore ey start. Are ye quite sure Potts didna owerhear your conversation wi' Mistress Nutter?"

"Why d'ye ask, Jem?" she replied.

"Fro' summat the knave threw out to Squoire Nicholas, just now," rejoined Jem. "He said he 'd another case o' witchcraft nearer whoam. Whot could he mean?"

"Whot, indeed?" cried Elizabeth, quickly.

"Look at Tib," exclaimed her son.

As he spoke, the cat sprang towards the inner door, and scratched violently against it.

Elizabeth immediately raised the latch, and found Jennet behind it, with a face like scarlet.

"Yo'n been listenin, ye young eaves-dropper," cried Elizabeth, boxing her ears soundly, "take that fo your pains — an that."

"Touch me again, an Mester Potts shan knoa aw ey'n heer'd," said the little girl, repressing her tears.

Elizabeth regarded her angrily; but the looks of the child were so spiteful, that she did not dare to strike her. She

glanced too at Tib; but the uncertain cat was now rubbing himself in the most friendly manner against Jennet.

"Yo shan pay for this, lass, presently," said Elizabeth.

"Best nah provoke me, mother," rejoined Jennet, in a determined tone; "if ye dun, aw secrets shan out. Ey knoa why Jem 's goin' to Malkin Tower to-neet — an why yo're afeerd o' Mester Potts."

"Howd thy tongue or ey'n choke thee, little pest," cried her mother, fiercely.

Jennet replied with a mocking laugh, while Tib rubbed against her more fondly than ever.

"Let her alone," interposed Jem. "An now ey mun be off. So, fare ye weel, mother, — an yo, too, Jennet." And with this, he put on his cap, seized his cudgel, and quitted the cottage.

CHAPTER VII.

The ruined conventual church.

BENEATH a wild cherry-tree, planted by chance in the Abbey gardens, and of such remarkable size that it almost rivalled the elms and lime-trees surrounding it, and when in bloom resembled an enormous garland, stood two young maidens, both of rare beauty, though in totally different styles; — the one being fair-haired, and blue-eyed, with a snowy skin tinged with delicate bloom, like that of roses seen through milk, to borrow a simile from old Anacreon; while the other far eclipsed her in the brilliancy of her complexion, the dark splendour of her eyes, and the luxuriance of her jetty tresses, which, unbound and knotted with ribands, flowed down almost to the ground. In age, there was little disparity between them, though perhaps the dark-haired girl might be a year nearer twenty than the other, and somewhat

more of seriousness, though not much, sat upon her lovely countenance than on the other's laughing features. Different were they, too, in degree, and here social position was infinitely in favour of the fairer girl, but no one would have judged it so if not previously acquainted with their history. Indeed, it was rather the one having least title to be proud (if any one has such title) who now seemed to look up to her companion with mingled admiration and regard; the latter being enthralled at the moment by the rich notes of a thrush poured from a neighbouring lime-tree.

Pleasant was the garden where the two girls stood, shaded by great trees, laid out in exquisite parterres, with knots and figures, quaint flower-beds, shorn trees and hedges, covered alleys and arbours, terraces and mounds, in the taste of the time, and above all an admirably kept bowling-green. It was bounded on the one hand by the ruined chapter-house and vestry of the old monastic structure, and on the other by the stately pile of buildings formerly making part of the Abbot's lodging, in which the long gallery was situated, some of its windows looking upon the bowling-green, and then kept in excellent condition, but now roofless, and desolate. Behind them, on the right, half-hidden by trees, lay the desecrated and despoiled conventual church. Reared at such cost, and with so much magnificence, by thirteen abbots; the great work having been commenced, as heretofore stated, by Robert de Topcliffe, in 1330, and only completed in all its details by John Paslew; this splendid structure, surpassing, according to Whitaker, "many cathedrals in extent," was now abandoned to the slow ravages of decay. Would it had never encountered worse enemy! But some half century later, the hand of man was called in to accelerate its destruction, and it was then almost entirely rased to the ground. At the period in question, though partially unroofed, and

with some of the walls destroyed, it was still beautiful and picturesque — more picturesque, indeed, than in the days of its pride and splendour. The tower with its lofty crocketed spire was still standing, though the latter was cracked, and tottering, and the jackdaws roosted within its windows and belfry. Two ranges of broken columns told of the bygone glories of the aisles; and the beautiful side chapels having escaped injury better than other parts of the fabric, remained in tolerable preservation. But the choir and high altar were stripped of all their rich carving and ornaments, and the rain descended through the open rood-loft upon the now grass-grown graves of the abbots in the presbytery. Here and there the ramified mullions still retained their wealth of painted glass, and the grand eastern window shone gorgeously as of yore. All else was neglect and ruin. Briars and turf usurped the place of the marble pavement; many of the pillars were festooned with ivy; and, in some places, the shattered walls were covered with creepers, and trees had taken root in the crevices of the masonry. Beautiful at all times were these magnificent ruins; but never so beautiful as when seen by the witching light of the moon — the hour, according to the best authority, when all ruins should be viewed — when the long lines of broken pillars, the moulder-ing arches, and the still glowing panes over the altar, had a magical effect.

In front of the maidens stood a square tower, part of the defences of the religious establishment erected by Abbot Lyndelay, in the reign of Edward III., but disused and decaying. It was sustained by high and richly-groined arches, crossing the swift mill-race, and faced the river. A path led through the ruined chapter-house, to the spacious cloister quadrangle, once used as a cemetery for the monks, but now converted into a kitchen-garden, its broad area being planted

out, and fruit trees trained against the hoary walls. Little of the old refectory was left, except the dilapidated stairs once conducting to the gallery where the brethren were wont to take their meals, but the inner wall still served to inclose the garden on that side. Of the dormitory, formerly constituting the eastern angle of the cloisters, the shell was still left, and it was used partly as a grange, partly as a shed for cattle, the farm-yard and tenements lying on this side.

Thus it will be seen, that the garden and grounds, filling up the ruins of Whalley Abbey, offered abundant points of picturesque attraction, all of which — with the exception of the ruined conventual church, — had been visited by the two girls. They had tracked the labyrinths of passages, scaled the broken staircases, crept into the roofless and neglected chambers, peered timorously into the black and yawning vaults, and now having finished their investigations, had paused for awhile, previous to extending their ramble to the church, beneath the wild cherry-tree to listen to the warbling of the birds.

"You should hear the nightingales at Middleton, Alizon," observed Dorothy Assheton, breaking silence; "they sing even more exquisitely than yon thrush. You must come and see me. I should like to show you the old house and gardens, though they are very different from these, and we have no ancient monastic ruins to ornament them. Still, they are very beautiful; and, as I find you are fond of flowers, I will show you some I have reared myself, for I am something of a gardener, Alizon. Promise you will come."

"I wish I dared promise it," replied Alizon.

"And why not, then?" cried Dorothy. "What should prevent you? Do you know, Alizon, what I should like better than all? You are so amiable, and so good, and so — so very pretty; nay don't blush — there is no one by to hear

me — you are so charming altogether that I should like you to come and live with me. You shall be my handmaiden if you will."

"I should desire nothing better, sweet young lady," replied Alizon; "but —"

"But what?" cried Dorothy. "You have only your own consent to obtain."

"Alas! I have," replied Alizon.

"How can that be!" cried Dorothy, with a disappointed look. "It is not likely your mother will stand in the way of your advancement, and you have not, I suppose, any other tie? Nay, forgive me if I appear too inquisitive. My curiosity only proceeds from the interest I take in you."

"I know it — I feel it, dear; kind young lady," replied Alizon, with the colour again mounting her cheeks. "I have no tie in the world except my family. But I am persuaded my mother will never allow me to quit her, however great the advantage might be to me."

"Well, though sorry, I am scarcely surprised at it," said Dorothy. "She must love you too dearly to part with you."

"I wish I could think so," sighed Alizon. "Proud of me in some sort, though with little reason, she may be, but love me, most assuredly, she does not. Nay more, I am persuaded she would be glad to be freed from my presence, which is an evident restraint and annoyance to her, were it not for some motive stronger than natural affection that binds her to me."

"Now, in good sooth, you amaze me, Alizon!" cried Dorothy. "What possible motive can it be, if not of affection?"

"Of interest, I think," replied Alizon. "I speak to you without reserve, dear young lady, for the sympathy you have shown me deserves and demands confidence on my part, and there are none with whom I can freely converse, so that every

emotion has been locked up in my own bosom. My mother fancies I shall one day be of use to her, and, therefore, keeps me with her. Hints to this effect she has thrown out, when indulging in the uncontrollable fits of passion to which she is liable. And yet I have no just reason to complain, for though she has shown me little maternal tenderness, and repelled all exhibition of affection on my part, she has treated me very differently from her other children, and with much greater consideration. I can make slight boast of education, but the best the village could afford has been given me; and I have derived much religious culture from good Doctor Ormerod. The kind ladies of the vicarage proposed, as you have done, that I should live with them, but my mother forbade it; enjoining me, on the peril of incurring her displeasure, not to leave her, and reminding me of all the benefits I have received from her, and of the necessity of making an adequate return. And, ungrateful indeed I should be, if I did not comply; for though her manner is harsh and cold to me, she has never ill-used me, as she has done her favourite child, my little sister Jennet, but has always allowed me a separate chamber, where I can retire when I please, to read, or meditate, or pray. For alas! dear young lady, I dare not pray before my mother. Be not shocked at what I tell you, but I cannot hide it. My poor mother denies herself the consolation of religion — never addresses herself to Heaven in prayer — never opens the book of Life and Truth — never enters church. In her own mistaken way she has brought up poor little Jennet, who has been taught to make a scoff at religious truths and ordinances, and has never been suffered to keep holy the Sabbath-day. Happy and thankful am I, that no such evil lessons have been taught me, but rather, that I have profited by the sad example. In my own secret chamber I have prayed, daily and nightly, for both — prayed that

their hearts might be turned. Often have I besought my mother to let me take Jennet to church, but she never would consent. And in that poor misguided child, dear young lady, there is a strange mixture of good and ill. Afflicted with personal deformity, and delicate in health, the mind, perhaps, sympathising with the body, she is wayward and uncertain in temper, but sensivite and keenly alive to kindness, and with a shrewdness beyond her years. At the risk of offending my mother, for I felt confident I was acting rightly, I have endeavoured to instil religious principles into her heart, and to inspire her with a love of truth. Sometimes she has listened to me; and I have observed strange struggles in her nature, as if the good were obtaining mastery of the evil principle, and I have striven the more to convince her, and win her over, but never with entire success, for my efforts have been overcome by pernicious counsels, and sceptical sneers. Oh, dear young lady, what would I not do to be the instrument of her salvation!"

"You pain me much by this relation, Alizon," said Dorothy Assheton, who had listened with profound attention, "and I now wish more ardently than ever to take you from such a family."

"I cannot leave them, dear young lady," replied Alizon; "for I feel I may be of infinite service — especially to Jennet — by staying with them. Where there is a soul to be saved, especially the soul of one dear as a sister, no sacrifice can be too great to make — no price too heavy to pay. By the blessing of Heaven I hope to save her! And that is the great tie that binds me to a home, only so in name."

"I will not oppose your virtuous intentions, dear Alizon," replied Dorothy; "but I must now mention a circumstance in connexion with your mother, of which you are perhaps in ignorance, but which it is right you should know, and there-

fore no false delicacy on my part shall restrain me from mentioning it. Your grandmother, Old Demdike, is in very ill repute in Pendle, and is stigmatised by the common folk, and even by others, as a witch. Your mother, too, shares in the opprobrium attaching to her."

"I dreaded this," replied Alizon, turning deadly pale, and trembling violently, "I feared you had heard the terrible report. But oh, believe it not. My poor mother is erring enough, but she is not so bad as that. Oh, believe it not!"

"I will not believe it," said Dorothy, "since she is blessed with such a daughter as you. But what I fear is that you — you so kind, so good, so beautiful — may come under the same ban."

"I must run this risk also, in the good work I have appointed myself," replied Alizon. "If I am ill thought of by men, I shall have the approval of my own conscience to uphold me. Whatever betide, and whatever be said, do not you think ill of me, dear young lady."

"Fear it not," returned Dorothy, earnestly.

While thus conversing, they gradually strayed away from the cherry-tree, and taking a winding path leading in that direction, entered the conventual church, about the middle of the south aisle. After gazing with wonder and delight at the still majestic pillars, that, like ghosts of the departed brethren, seemed to protest against the desolation around them, they took their way along the nave, through broken arches, and over prostrate fragments of stone, to the eastern extremity of the fane, and having admired the light shafts and clerestory windows of the choir, as well as the magnificent painted glass over the altar, they stopped before an arched door-way on the right, with two Gothic niches, in one of which was a small stone statue of Saint Agnes, with her lamb, and in the other a similar representation of Saint Margaret,

crowned, and piercing the dragon, with a cross. Both were sculptures of much merit, and it was wonderful they had escaped destruction. The door was closed, but it easily opened when tried by Dorothy, and they found themselves in a small but beautiful chapel. What struck them chiefly in it was a magnificent monument of white marble, enriched with numerous small shields, painted and gilt, supporting two recumbent figures, representing Henry de Lacy, one of the founders of the Abbey, and his consort. The knight was cased in plate armour, covered with a surcoat, emblazoned with his arms, and his feet resting upon a hound. This superb monument was wholly uninjured, the painting and gilding being still fresh and bright. Behind it a flag had been removed, discovering a flight of steep stone steps, leading to a vault, or other subterranean chamber.

After looking round this chapel, Dorothy remarked, "There is something else that has just occurred to me. When a child a strange dark tale was told me to the effect that the last ill-fated Abbot of Whalley laid his dying curse upon your grandmother, then an infant, predicting that she should be a witch, and the mother of witches."

"I have heard the dread tradition, too," rejoined Alizon; "but I cannot, will not, believe it. An all-benign Power will never sanction such terrible imprecations."

"Far be it from me to affirm the contrary," replied Dorothy; "but it is undoubted that some families have been, and are, under the influence of an inevitable fatality. In one respect, connected also with the same unfortunate prelate, I might instance our own family. Abbot Paslew is said to be unlucky to us even in his grave. If such a curse, as I have described, hangs over the head of your family, all your efforts to remove it will be ineffectual."

"I trust not," said Alizon. "Oh! dear young lady, you

have now penetrated the secret of my heart. The mystery of my life is laid open to you. Disguise it as I may, I cannot but believe my mother to be under some baneful influence. Her unholy life, her strange actions, all impress me with the idea. And there is the same tendency in Jennet."

"You have a brother, have you not?" inquired Dorothy.

"I have," returned Alizon, slightly colouring; "but I see little of him, for he lives near my grandmother in Pendle Forest, and always avoids me in his rare visits here. You will think it strange when I tell you I have never beheld my grandmother Demdike."

"I am glad to hear it," exclaimed Dorothy.

"I have never even been to Pendle," pursued Alizon, "though Jennet and my mother go there frequently. At one time I much wished to see my aged relative, and pressed my mother to take me with her; but she refused, and now I have no desire to go."

"Strange!" exclaimed Dorothy. "Every thing you tell me strengthens the idea I conceived the moment I saw you, and which my brother also entertained, that you are not the daughter of Elizabeth Device."

"Did your brother think this?" cried Alizon, eagerly. But she immediately cast down her eyes.

"He did," replied Dorothy, not noticing her confusion. "'It is impossible,' he said, 'that that lovely girl can be sprung from' — but I will not wound you by adding the rest."

"I cannot disown my kindred," said Alizon. "Still, I must confess that some notions of the sort have crossed me, arising, probably, from my mother's extraordinary treatment, and from many other circumstances, which, though trifling in themselves, were not without weight in leading me to the conclusion. Hitherto, I have treated it only as a passing fancy, but if you and Master Richard Assheton" — and her

voice slightly faltered as she pronounced the name — "think so, it may warrant me in more seriously considering the matter."

"Do consider it most seriously, dear Alizon," cried Dorothy. "I have made up my mind, and Richard has made up his mind, too, that you are not Mother Demdike's granddaughter, nor Elizabeth Device's daughter, nor Jennet's sister — nor any relation of theirs. We are sure of it, and we will have you of our mind."

The fair and animated speaker could not help noticing the blushes that mantled Alizon's cheeks as she spoke, but she attributed them to other than the true cause. Nor did she mend the matter, as she proceeded.

"I am sure you are well born, Alizon," she said, "and so it will be found in the end. And Richard thinks so, too, for he said so to me, and Richard is my oracle, Alizon."

In spite of herself, Alizon's eyes sparkled with pleasure; but she speedily checked the emotion.

"I must not indulge the dream," she said, with a sigh.

"Why not?" cried Dorothy. "I will have strict inquiries made as to your history."

"I cannot consent to it," replied Alizon. "I cannot leave one, who, if she be not my parent, has stood to me in that relation. Neither can I have her brought into trouble on my account. What will she think of me, if she learns I have indulged such a notion? She will say, and with truth, that I am the most ungrateful of human beings, as well as the most unnatural of children. No, dear young lady, it must not be. These fancies are brilliant, but fallacious, and, like bubbles, burst as soon as formed."

"I admire your sentiments, though I do not admit the justice of your reasoning," rejoined Dorothy. "It is not on your own account merely, though that is much, that the secret

of your birth, if there be one, ought to be cleared up; but, for the sake of those with whom you may be connected. There may be a mother, like mine, weeping for you as lost — a brother, like Richard, mourning you as dead. Think of the sad hearts your restoration will make joyful. As to Elizabeth Device, no consideration should be shown her. If she has stolen you from your parents, as I suspect, she deserves no pity."

"All this is mere surmise, dear young lady," replied Alizon.

At this juncture, they were startled by seeing an old woman come from behind the monument and plant herself before them. Both uttered a cry, and would have fled, but a gesture from the crone detained them. Very old was she, and of strange and sinister aspect, almost blind, bent double, with frosted brows and chin, and shaking with palsy.

"Stay where you are," cried the hag, in an imperious tone. "I want to speak to you. Come nearer to me, my pretty wheans, — nearer — nearer."

And as they complied, drawn towards her by an impulse they could not resist, the old woman caught hold of Alizon's arm, and said with a chuckle, "So, you are the wench they call Alizon Device, eh!"

"Ay," replied Alizon, trembling like a dove in the talons of a hawk.

"Do you know who I am?" cried the hag, grasping her yet more tightly. "Do you know who I am, I say? If not, I will tell you. I am Mother Chattox, of Pendle Forest, the rival of Mother Demdike, and the enemy of all her accursed brood. Now, do you know me, wench? Men call me witch. Whether I am so or not, I have some power, as they and you shall find. Mother Demdike has often defied me — often injured me, but I will have my revenge upon her — ha! ha!"

"Let me go," cried Alizon, greatly terrified.

"I will run and bring assistance," cried Dorothy. And she flew to the door, but it resisted her attempts to open it.

"Come back," screamed the hag. "You strive in vain. The door is fast shut — fast shut. Come back I say. Who are you?" she added, as the maid drew near, ready to sink with terror. "Your voice is an Assheton's voice. I know you now. You are Dorothy Assheton — whey-skinned, blue-eyed Dorothy. Listen to me, Dorothy. I owe your family a grudge, and if you provoke me I will pay it off in part on you. Stir not as you value your life."

The poor girl did not dare to move, and Alizon remained, as if fascinated by the terrible old woman.

"I will tell you what has happened, Dorothy," pursued Mother Chattox. "I came hither to Whalley on business of my own; meddling with no one; harming no one. Tread upon the adder and it will bite, and when molested I bite like the adder. Your cousin, Nick Assheton, came in my way, called me 'witch,' and menaced me. I cursed him — ha! ha! And then your brother Richard —"

"What of him, in Heaven's name?" almost shrieked Alizon.

"How 's this?" exclaimed Mother Chattox, placing her hand on the beating heart of the girl.

"What of Richard Assheton?" repeated Alizon.

"You love him, I feel you do, wench," cried the old crone, with fierce exultation.

"Release me, wicked woman," cried Alizon.

"Wicked, am I? ha! ha!" rejoined Mother Chattox, chuckling maliciously, "because, forsooth, I read thy heart, and betray its secrets. Wicked, eh! I tell thee, wench, again, Richard Assheton is lord and master here. Every pulse in thy

bosom beats for him—for him alone. But beware of his love. Beware of it, I say. It shall bring thee ruin and despair."

"For pity's sake, release me," implored Alizon.

"Not yet," replied the inexorable old woman, "not yet. My tale is not half told. My curse fell on Richard's head, as it did on Nicholas's. And then the hell-hounds thought to catch me; but they were at fault. I tricked them nicely — ha! ha! However, they took my Nance — my pretty Nance — they seized her, bound her, bore her to the Calder — and there swam her. Curses light on them all! — all! — but chief on him who did it!"

"Who was he?" inquired Alizon, tremblingly.

"Jem Device," replied the old woman — "it was he who bound her — he who plunged her in the river, he who swam her. But I will pinch and plague him for it. I will strew his couch with nettles, and all wholesome food shall be poison to him. His blood shall be as water, and his flesh shrink from his bones. He shall waste away slowly — slowly — slowly — till he drops like a skeleton into the grave ready digged for him. All connected with him shall feel my fury. I would kill thee now, if thou wert aught of his."

"Aught of his! What mean you, old woman?" demanded Alizon.

"Why this," rejoined Mother Chattox, "and let the knowledge work in thee, to the confusion of Bess Device. Thou art not her daughter."

"It is as I thought," cried Dorothy Assheton, roused by the intelligence from her terror.

"I tell thee not this secret to pleasure thee," continued Mother Chattox, "but to confound Elizabeth Device. I have no other motive. She hath provoked my vengeance, and she shall feel it. Thou art not her child, I say. The secret of thy birth is known to me, but the time is not yet come for its dis-

closure. It shall out, one day, to the confusion of those who offend me. When thou goest home tell thy reputed mother what I have said, and mark how she takes the information. Ha! who comes here?"

The hag's last exclamation was occasioned by the sudden appearance of Mistress Nutter, who opened the door of the chapel, and staring in astonishment at the group, came quickly forward.

"What makes you here, Mother Chattox?" she cried.

"I came here to avoid pursuit," replied the old hag, with a cowed manner, and in accents sounding strangely submissive after her late infuriated tone.

"What have you been saying to these girls?" demanded Mistress Nutter, authoritatively.

"Ask them," the hag replied.

"She declares that Alizon is not the daughter of Elizabeth Device," cried Dorothy Assheton.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mistress Nutter, quickly, and as if a spring of extraordinary interest had been suddenly touched. "What reason hast thou for this assertion?"

"No good reason," replied the old woman, evasively, yet with evident apprehension of her questioner.

"Good reason or bad, I will have it," cried Mistress Nutter.

"What you, too, take an interest in the wench like the rest," returned Mother Chattox. "Is she so very winning?"

"That is no answer to my question," said the lady. "Whose child is she?"

"Ask Bess Device, or Mother Demdike," replied Mother Chattox; "they know more about the matter than me."

"I will have thee speak, and to the purpose," cried the lady, angrily.

"Many an one has lost a child who would gladly have it back again," said the old hag, mysteriously.

"Who has lost one?" asked Mistress Nutter.

"Nay, it passeth me to tell," replied the old woman, with affected ignorance. "Question those who stole her. I have set you on the track. If you fail in pursuing it, come to me. You know where to find me."

"You shall not go thus," said Mistress Nutter. "I will have a direct answer now."

And as she spoke she waved her hands twice or thrice over the old woman. In doing this her figure seemed to dilate, and her countenance underwent a marked and fearful change. All her beauty vanished, her eyes blazed, and terror sat on her wrinkled brow. The hag, on the contrary, crouched lower down, and seemed to dwindle less than her ordinary size. Writhing as from heavy blows, and with a mixture of malice and fear in her countenance, she cried, "Were I to speak, you would not thank me. Let me go."

"Answer," vociferated Mistress Nutter, disregarding the caution, and speaking in a sharp piercing voice, strangely contrasting with her ordinary utterance. "Answer, I say, or I will beat thee to the dust."

And she continued her gestures, while the sufferings of the old hag evidently increased, and she crouched nearer and nearer to the ground, moaning out the words, "Do not force me to speak. You will repent it! — you will repent it!"

"Do not torment her thus, Madam," cried Alizon, who with Dorothy looked at the strange scene with mingled apprehension and wonderment. "Much as I desire to know the secret of my birth, I would not obtain it thus."

As she uttered these words, the old woman contrived to shuffle off, and disappeared behind the tomb.

"Why did you interpose, Alizon," cried Mistress Nutter, somewhat angrily, and dropping her hands. "You broke the power I had over her. I would have compelled her to speak."

"I thank you, gracious lady, for your consideration," replied Alizon, gratefully; "but the sight was too painful."

"What has become of her — where is she gone?" cried Dorothy, peeping behind the tomb. "She has crept into this vault, I suppose."

"Do not trouble yourself about her more, Dorothy," said Mistress Nutter, resuming her wonted voice, and wonted looks. "Let us return to the house. Thus much is ascertained, Alizon, that you are no child of your supposed parent. Wait a little, and the rest shall be found out for you. And, meantime, be assured that I take strong interest in you."

"That we all do," added Dorothy.

"Thank you! thank you!" exclaimed Alizon, almost overpowered.

With this they went forth, and traversing the shafted aisle, quitted the conventual church, and took their way along the alley leading to the garden.

"Say not a word at present to Elizabeth Device of the information you have obtained, Alizon," observed Mistress Nutter. "I have reasons for this counsel, which I will afterwards explain to you. And do you keep silence on the subject, Dorothy."

"May I not tell Richard?" said the young lady.

"Not Richard — not any one," returned Mistress Nutter, "or you may seriously affect Alizon's prospects."

"You have cautioned me in time," cried Dorothy, "for here comes my brother with our cousin Nicholas."

And as she spoke a turn in the alley showed Richard and Nicholas Assheton, advancing towards them.

A strange revolution had been produced in Alizon's feelings by the events of the last half hour. The opinions expressed by Dorothy Assheton, as to her birth, had been singularly confirmed by Mother Chattox; but could reliance

be placed on the old woman's assertions? Might they not have been made with mischievous intent? And was it not possible, nay, probable, that, in her place of concealment behind the tomb, the vindictive hag had overheard the previous conversation with Dorothy, and based her own declaration upon it? All these suggestions occurred to Alizon, but the previous idea having once gained admission to her breast, soon estab lished itself firmly there, in spite of doubts and misgivings, and began to mix itself up with new thoughts and wishes, with which other persons were connected; for she could not help fancying she might be well-born, and if so the vast distance heretofore existing between her and Richard Assheton might be greatly diminished, if not altogether removed. So rapid is the progress of thought, that only a few minutes were required for this long train of reflections to pass through her mind, and it was merely put to flight by the approach of the main object of her thoughts.

On joining the party, Richard Assheton saw plainly that something had happened; but as both his sister and Alizon laboured under evident embarrassment he abstained from making inquiries as to its cause for the present, hoping a better opportunity of doing so would occur, and the conversation was kept up by Nicholas Assheton, who described in his wonted lively manner the encounter with Mother Chattox and Nance Redferne, the swimming of the latter, and the trickery and punishment of Potts. During the recital Mistress Nutter often glanced uneasily at the two girls, but neither of them offered any interruption, until Nicholas had finished, when Dorothy taking her brother's hand, said, with a look of affectionate admiration "You acted like yourself, dear Richard."

Alizon did not venture to give utterance to the same sentiment, but her looks plainly expressed it.

"I only wish you had punished that cruel James Device as well as saved poor Nance," added Dorothy.

"Hush!" exclaimed Richard, glancing at Alizon.

"You need not be afraid of hurting her feelings," cried the young lady. "She does not mind him now."

"What do you mean, Dorothy?" cried Richard, in surprise.

"Oh, nothing — nothing," she replied, hastily.

"Perhaps you will explain," said Richard to Alizon.

"Indeed I cannot," she answered, in confusion.

"You would have laughed to see Potts creep out of the river," said Nicholas, turning to Dorothy; "he looked just like a drowned rat — ha! — ha!"

"You have made a bitter enemy of him, Nicholas," observed Mistress Nutter; "so look well to yourself."

"I heed him not," rejoined the squire, "he knows me now too well to meddle with me again, and I shall take good care how I put myself in his power. One thing I may mention, to show the impotent malice of the knave. Just as he was setting off, he said, 'This is not the only discovery of witchcraft I have made to-day. I have another case, nearer home.' What could he mean?"

"I know not," replied Mistress Nutter, a shade of disquietude passing over her countenance. "But he is quite capable of bringing the charge against you or any of us."

"He is so," said Nicholas. "After what has occurred, I wonder whether he will go over to Rough Lee to-morrow."

"Very likely not," replied Mistress Nutter, "and in that case Master Roger Nowell must provide some other person competent to examine the boundary-line of the properties on his behalf."

"Then you are confident of the adjudication being in your favour?" said Nicholas.

"Quite so," replied Mistress Nutter, with a self-satisfied smile.

"The result, I hope, may justify your expectation," said Nicholas; "but it is right to tell you, that Sir Ralph, in consenting to postpone his decision, has only done so out of consideration to you. If the division of the properties be as represented by him, Master Nowell will unquestionably obtain an award in his favour."

"Under such circumstances, he may," said Mistress Nutter; "but you will find the contrary turn out to be the fact. I will show you a plan I have had lately prepared, and you can then judge for yourself."

While thus conversing, the party passed through a door in the high stone wall dividing the garden from the court, and proceeded towards the principal entrance of the mansion. Built out of the ruins of the Abbey, which had served as a very convenient quarry for the construction of this edifice, as well as for Portfield, the house was large and irregular, planned chiefly with the view of embodying part of the old abbot's lodging, and consisting of a wide front, with two wings, one of which looked into the court, and the other, comprehending the long gallery, into the garden. The old north-east gate of the Abbey, with its lofty archway and embattled walls served as an entrance to the great court-yard, and at its wicket ordinarily stood Ned Huddlestone, the porter, though he was absent on the present occasion, being occupied with the May Day festivities. Immediately opposite the gateway sprang a flight of stone steps, with a double landing-place and a broad balustrade of the same material, on the lowest pillar of which was placed a large escutcheon sculptured with the arms of the family — argent, a mullet sable — with a rebus on the name — an ash on a tun The great door to which these steps conducted stood wide open, and before it, on the upper

landing-place, were collected Lady Assheton, Mistress Braddyll, Mistress Nicholas Assheton, and some other dames, laughing and conversing together. Some long-eared spaniels, favourites of the lady of the house, were chasing each other up and down the steps, disturbing the slumbers of a couple of fine blood-hounds in the court-yard; or persecuting the proud peafowl that strutted about to display their gorgeous plumage to the spectators.

On seeing the party approach, Lady Assheton came down to meet them.

"You have been long absent," she said to Dorothy; "but I suppose you have been exploring the ruins?"

"Yes, we have not left a hole or corner unvisited," was the reply.

"That is right," said Lady Assheton. "I knew you would make a good guide, Dorothy. Of course you have often seen the old conventual church before, Alizon?"

"I am ashamed to say I have not, your ladyship," she replied.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Lady Assheton; "and yet you have lived all your life in the village?"

"Quite true, your ladyship," answered Alizon; "but these ruins have been prohibited to me."

"Not by us," said Lady Assheton; "they are open to every one."

"I was forbidden to visit them by my mother," said Alizon. And for the first time the word "mother" seemed strange to her.

Lady Assheton looked surprised, but made no remark, and mounting the steps, led the way to a spacious though not very lofty chamber, with huge uncovered rafters, and a floor of polished oak. Over a great fire-place at one side, furnished with immense andirons, hung a noble pair of antlers, and si-

milar trophies of the chase, were affixed to other parts of the walls. Here and there were likewise hung rusty skull-caps, breast-plates, two-handed and single-handed swords, maces, halberts, and arquebusses, with chain-shirts, buff-jerkins, match-locks, and other warlike implements, amongst which were several shields painted with the arms of the Assbetons and their alliances. High-backed chairs of gilt leather were ranged against the walls, and ebony cabinets inlaid with ivory were set between them at intervals, supporting rare specimens of glass and earthenware. Opposite the fire-place stood a large clock, curiously painted and decorated with emblematical devices, with the signs of the zodiac, and provided with moveable figures to strike the hours on a bell; while from the centre of the roof hung a great chandelier of stag's horn.

Lady Assheton did not tarry long within the entrance hall, for such it was, but conducted her guests through an arched door-way on the right into the long gallery. One hundred and fifty feet in length, and proportionately wide and lofty, this vast chamber had undergone little change since its original construction by the old owners of the Abbey. Panelled and floored with lustrous oak, and hung in some parts with antique tapestry, representing scriptural subjects, one side was pierced with lofty pointed windows, looking out upon the garden, while the southern extremity boasted a magnificent window, with heavy stone mullions, though of more recent workmanship than the frame-work, commanding Whalley Nab and the river. The furniture of the apartment was grand but gloomy, and consisted of antique chairs and tables belonging to the Abbey. Some curious ecclesiastical sculptures, wood carvings, and saintly images were placed at intervals near the walls, and on the upper panels were hung a row of family portraits.

Quitting the rest of the company, and proceeding to the southern window, Dorothy invited Alizon and her brother to

place themselves beside her on the cushioned seats of the deep embrasure. Little conversation, however, ensued; Alizon's heart being too full for utterance, and recent occurrences engrossing Dorothy's thoughts, to the exclusion of every thing else. Having made one or two unsuccessful efforts to engage them in talk, Richard likewise lapsed into silence, and gazed out on the lovely scenery before him. The evening has been described as beautiful; and the swift Calder, as it hurried by, was tinged with rays of the declining sun, whilst the woody heights of Whalley Nab were steeped in the same rosy light. But the view failed to interest Richard in his present mood, and after a brief survey, he stole a look at Alizon, and was surprised to find her in tears.

"What saddening thoughts cross you, fair girl?" he inquired, with deep interest.

"I can hardly account for my sudden despondency," she replied; "but I have heard that great happiness is the precursor of dejection, and the saying I suppose must be true, for I have been happier to-day than I ever was before in my life. But the feeling of sadness is now past," she added, smiling.

"I am glad of it," said Richard. "May I not know what has occurred to you?"

"Not at present," interposed Dorothy; "but I am sure you will be pleased when you are made acquainted with the circumstance. I would tell you now if I might."

"May I guess?" said Richard.

"I don't know," rejoined Dorothy, who was dying to tell him. "May he?"

"Oh no — no!" cried Alizon.

"You are very perverse," said Richard, with a look of disappointment. "There can be no harm in guessing; and you can please yourself as to giving an answer. I fancy, then, that Alizon has made some discovery."

Dorothy nodded.

"Relative to her parentage?" pursued Richard.

Another nod.

"She has found out she is not Elizabeth Device's daughter?" said Richard.

"Some witch must have told you this," exclaimed Dorothy.

"Have I indeed guessed rightly?" cried Richard, with an eagerness that startled his sister. "Do not keep me in suspense. Speak plainly."

"How am I to answer him, Alizon?" said Dorothy.

"Nay, do not appeal to me, dear young lady," she answered, blushing.

"I have gone too far to retreat," rejoined Dorothy, "and therefore despite Mistress Nutter's interdiction the truth shall out. You have guessed shrewdly, Richard. A discovery *has* been made — a very great discovery. Alizon is not the daughter of Elizabeth Device."

"The intelligence delights me, though it scarcely surprises me," cried Richard, gazing with heartfelt pleasure at the blushing girl; "for I was sure of the fact from the first. Nothing so good and charming as Alizon could spring from so foul a source. How and by what means you have derived this information, as well as whose daughter you are, I shall wait patiently to learn. Enough for me you are not the sister of James Device — enough, you are not the grand-child of Mother Demdike."

"You know all I know, in knowing thus much," replied Alizon, timidly. "And secrecy has been enjoined by Mistress Nutter in order that the rest may be found out. But oh! should the hopes I have — perhaps too hastily — indulged, prove fallacious —"

"They cannot be fallacious, Alizon," interrupted Richard, eagerly. "On that score rest easy. Your connexion with that

wretched family is for ever broken. But I can see the necessity of caution, and shall observe it. And so Mistress Nutter takes an interest in you?"

"The strongest," replied Dorothy; "but see! she comes this way."

But we must now go back for a short space.

While Mistress Nutter and Nicholas were seated at a table examining a plan of the Rough Lee estates, the latter was greatly astonished to see the door open and give admittance to Master Potts, who he fancied snugly lying between a couple of blankets, at the Dragon. The attorney was clad in a riding-dress, which he had exchanged for his wet habiliments, and was accompanied by Sir Ralph Assheton and Master Roger Nowell. On seeing Nicholas, he instantly stepped up to him.

"Aha! squire," he cried, "you did not expect to see me again so soon, eh! A pottle of hot sack put my blood into circulation, and having luckily a change of raiment in my valise, I am all right again. Not so easily got rid of, you see!"

"So it appears," replied Nicholas, laughing.

"We have a trifling account to settle together, Sir," said the attorney, putting on a serious look.

"Whenever you please, Sir," replied Nicholas, good humouredly, tapping the hilt of his sword.

"Not in that way," cried Potts, darting quickly back. "I never fight with those weapons — never. Our dispute must be settled in a court of law, Sir — in a court of law. You understand, Master Nicholas?"

"There is a shrewd maxim, Master Potts, that he who is his own lawyer has a fool for his client," observed Nicholas, drily. "Would it not be better to stick to the defence of others rather than practise in your own behalf?"

"You have expressed my opinion, Master Nicholas," observed Roger Nowell; "and I hope Master Potts will not com-

mence any action on his own account till he has finished my business."

"Assuredly not, Sir, since you desire it," replied the attorney, obsequiously. "But my motives must not be mistaken. I have a clear case of assault and battery against Master Nicholas Assheton, or I may proceed against him criminally for an attempt on my life."

"Have you given him no provocation, Sir?" demanded Sir Ralph, sternly.

"No provocation can justify the treatment I have experienced, Sir Ralph," replied Potts. "However, to show I am a man of peace, and harbour no resentment, however just grounds I may have for such a feeling, I am willing to make up the matter with Master Nicholas, provided —"

"He offers you a handsome consideration, eh?" said the squire.

"Provided he offers me a handsome apology — such as a gentleman may accept," rejoined Potts, consequentially.

"And which he will not refuse, I am sure," said Sir Ralph, glancing at his cousin.

"I should certainly be sorry to have drowned you," said the squire, — "very sorry."

"Enough — enough — I am content," cried Potts, holding out his hand, which Nicholas grasped with an energy that brought tears into the little man's eyes.

"I am glad the matter is amicably adjusted," observed Roger Nowell, "for I suspect both parties have been to blame. And I must now request you, Master Potts, to forego your search and inquiries after witches, till such time as you have settled this question of the boundary line for me. One matter at a time, my good Sir."

"But, Master Nowell," cried Potts, "my much esteemed and singular good client" —

"I will have no nay," interrupted Nowell, peremptorily.

"Hum!" muttered Potts; "I shall lose the best chance of distinction ever thrown in my way."

"I care not," said Nowell.

"Just as you came up, Master Nowell," observed Nicholas, "I was examining a plan of the disputed estates in Pendle Forest. It differs from yours, and, if correct, certainly substantiates Mistress Nutter's claim."

"I have mine with me," replied Nowell, producing a plan, and opening it. "We can compare the two if you please. The line runs thus:—From the foot of Pendle Hill, beginning with Barley Booth, the boundary is marked by a stone wall, as far as certain fields in the occupation of John Ogden. Is it not so?"

"It is," replied Nicholas, comparing the statement with the other plan.

"It then runs on in a northerly direction," pursued Nowell, "towards Burst Clough, and here the landmarks are certain stones placed in the moor, one hundred yards apart, and giving me twenty acres of this land, and Mistress Nutter ten."

"On the contrary," replied Nicholas. "This plan gives Mistress Nutter twenty acres, and you ten."

"Then the plan is wrong," cried Nowell, sharply.

"It has been carefully prepared," said Mistress Nutter, who had approached the table.

"No matter, it is wrong, I say," cried Nowell, angrily.

"You see where the land-marks are placed, Master Nowell," said Nicholas, pointing to the measurement. "I merely go by them."

"The land-marks are improperly placed in that plan," cried Nowell.

"I will examine them myself to-morrow," said Potts, taking out a large memorandum-book; "there cannot be an

error of ten acres — ten perches — or ten feet, possibly, but acres — pshaw!"

"Laugh as you please; but go on," said Mistress Nutter.

"Well, then," pursued Nicholas, "the line approaches the bank of a rivulet called Moss Brook — a rare place for woodcocks and snipes, that Moss Brook, I may remark — the land on the left consisting of five acres of waste land, marked by a sheep-fold and two posts set up in a line with it, belonging to Mistress Nutter."

"To Mistress Nutter!" exclaimed Nowell, indignantly. "To me, you mean."

"It is here set down to Mistress Nutter," said Nicholas.

"Then it is set down wrongfully," cried Nowell. "That plan is altogether incorrect."

"On which side of the field does the rivulet flow?" inquired Potts.

"On the right," replied Nicholas.

"On the left," cried Nowell.

"There must be some extraordinary mistake," said Potts. "I shall make a note of that, and examine it to-morrow. — N.B. Waste land — sheep-fold — rivulet called Moss Brook flowing on the left."

"On the right," cried Mistress Nutter.

"That remains to be seen," rejoined Potts, "I have made the entry as on the left."

"Go on, Master Nicholas," said Nowell, "I should like to see how many other errors that plan contains."

"Passing the rivulet," pursued the squire, "we come to a footpath leading to the lime-stone quarry, about which there can be no mistake. Then by Cat Gallows Wood, and Swallow Hole; and then by another path to Worston Moor, skirting a hut in the occupation of James Device — ha! ha! Master Jem, are you here? I thought you dwelt with your grand-mother at

Malkin Tower — excuse me, Master Nowell, but one must relieve the dulness of this plan by an exclamation or so — and here being waste land again, the landmarks are certain stones set at intervals towards Hook Cliff, and giving Mistress Nutter two-thirds of the whole moor, and Master Roger Nowell one-third."

"False again," cried Nowell, furiously. "The two-thirds are mine, the one-third Mistress Nutter's."

"Somebody must be very wrong," cried Nicholas.

"Very wrong indeed," added Potts; "and I suspect that that somebody is —"

"Master Nowell," said Mistress Nutter.

"Mistress Nutter," cried Master Nowell.

"Both are wrong and both right, according to your own showing," said Nicholas, laughing.

"To-morrow will decide the question," said Potts.

"Better wait till then," interposed Sir Ralph. "Take both plans with you, and you will then ascertain which is correct."

"Agreed," cried Nowell. "Here is mine."

"And here is mine," said Mistress Nutter. "I will abide by the investigation."

"And Master Potts and I will verify the statements," said Nicholas.

"We will, Sir," replied the attorney, putting his memorandum book in his pocket. "We will."

The plans were then delivered to the custody of Sir Ralph, who promised to hand them over to Potts and Nicholas on the morrow.

The party then separated; Mistress Nutter shaping her course towards the window where Alizon and the two other young people were seated, while Potts plucking the squire's sleeve, said, with a very mysterious look, that he desired a

word with him in private. Wondering what could be the nature of the communication the attorney desired to make, Nicholas withdrew with him into a corner, and Nowell, who saw them retire, and could not help watching them with some curiosity, remarked that the squire's hilarious countenance fell as he listened to the attorney, while on the contrary, the features of the latter gleamed with malicious satisfaction.

Meanwhile, Mistress Nutter approached Alizon, and beckoning her towards her, they quitted the room together. As the young girl went forth, she cast a wistful look at Dorothy and her brother.

"You think with me, that that lovely girl is well born?" said Dorothy, as Alizon disappeared.

"It were heresy to doubt it," answered Richard.

"Shall I tell you another secret?" she continued, regarding him fixedly — "if, indeed, it be a secret, for you must be sadly wanting in discernment if you have not found it out ere this. She loves you."

"Dorothy!" exclaimed Richard.

"I am sure of it," she rejoined. "But I would not tell you this, if I were not quite equally sure that you love her in return."

"On my faith, Dorothy, you give yourself credit for wonderful penetration," cried Richard.

"Not a whit more than I am entitled to," she answered. "Nay, it will not do to attempt concealment with me. If I had not been certain of the matter before, your manner now would convince me. I am very glad of it. She will make a charming sister, and I shall be very fond of her."

"How you do run on, madcap!" cried her brother, trying to look displeased, but totally failing in assuming the expression.

"Stranger things have come to pass," said Dorothy; "and

one reads in story-books of young nobles marrying village maidens in spite of parental opposition. I dare say you will get nobody's consent to the marriage but mine, Richard."

"I dare say not," he replied, rather blankly.

"That is, if she should not turn out to be somebody's daughter," pursued Dorothy; "somebody, I mean, quite as great as the heir of Middleton, which I make no doubt she will."

"I hope she may," replied Richard.

"Why, you don't mean to say you wouldn't marry her if she didn't!" cried Dorothy. "I 'm ashamed of you, Richard."

"It would remove all opposition, at all events," said her brother.

"So it would," said Dorothy, "and now I 'll tell you another notion of mine, Richard. Somehow or other, it has come into my head, that Alizon is the daughter of — whom do you think?"

"Whom!" he cried.

"Guess," she rejoined.

"I can't," he exclaimed, impatiently.

"Well, then, I'll tell you without more ado," she answered. "Mind, it 's only my notion, and I've no precise grounds for it. But in my opinion, she 's the daughter of the lady who has just left the room."

"Of Mistress Nutter!" ejaculated Richard, starting. "What makes you think so?"

"The extraordinary and otherwise unaccountable interest she takes in her," replied Dorothy. "And, if you recollect, Mistress Nutter had an infant daughter, who was lost in a strange manner."

"I thought the child died," replied Richard, "but it may be as you say. I hope it is so."

"Time will show," said Dorothy, "but I have made up my mind about the matter."

At this moment, Nicholas Assheton came up to them, looking grave and uneasy.

"What has happened?" asked Richard, anxiously.

"I have just received some very unpleasant intelligence," replied Nicholas. "I told you of a menace uttered by that confounded Potts, on quitting me after his ducking. He has now spoken out plainly, and declares he overheard part of a conversation between Mistress Nutter and Elizabeth Device, which took place in the ruins of the convent church this morning, and he is satisfied that —"

"Well!" cried Richard, breathlessly.

"That Mistress Nutter is a witch, and in league with witches," continued Nicholas.

"Ha!" exclaimed Richard, turning deathly pale.

"I suspect the rascal has invented the charge," said Nicholas; "but he is quite unscrupulous enough to make it; and if made it will be fatal to our relative's reputation, if not to her life."

"It is false, I am sure of it," cried Richard, torn by conflicting emotions.

"Would I could think so!" cried Dorothy, suddenly recollecting Mistress Nutter's strange demeanour in the little chapel, and the unaccountable influence she seemed to exercise over the old crone. "But something has occurred to-day that leads me to a contrary conviction."

"What is it? Speak!" cried Richard.

"Not now — not now," replied Dorothy.

"Whatever suspicions you may entertain, keep silence, or you will destroy Mistress Nutter," said Nicholas.

"Fear me not," rejoined Dorothy. "Oh, Alizon!" she murmured, "that this unhappy question should arise at such a moment."

"Do you indeed believe the charge, Dorothy?" asked Richard, in a low voice.

"I do," she answered in the same tone. "If Alizon be her daughter, she can never be your wife."

"How?" cried Richard.

"Never — never," repeated Dorothy, emphatically. "The daughter of a witch, be that witch named Elizabeth Device or Alice Nutter, is no mate for you."

"You prejudge Mistress Nutter, Dorothy," he cried.

"Alas, Richard, I have too good reason for what I say," she answered, sadly.

Richard uttered an exclamation of despair. And on the instant the lively sounds of tabor and pipe, mixed with the jingling of bells, arose from the court-yard, and presently afterwards an attendant entered to announce that the May Day revellers were without, and directions were given by Sir Ralph that they should be shown into the great banqueting-hall below the gallery, which had been prepared for their reception.

CHAPTER VIII.

The revelation.

On quitting the long gallery, Mistress Nutter and Alizon, ascended a wide staircase, and traversing a corridor came to an antique, tapestried chamber, richly but cumbrously furnished, having a carved oak bedstead, with sombre hangings, a few high-backed chairs of the same material, and a massive wardrobe, with shrine-work atop, and two finely sculptured figures, of the size of life, in the habits of Cistertian monks,

placed as supporters at either extremity. At one side of the bed the tapestry was drawn aside, showing the entrance to a closet or inner room, and opposite it there was a great yawning fire-place, with a lofty mantel-piece and chimney projecting beyond the walls. The windows were narrow and darkened by heavy transom bars and small diamond panes, while the view without looking upon Whalley Nab, was obstructed by the contiguity of a tall cypress, whose funereal branches added to the general gloom. The room was one of those fomerly allotted to their guests by the hospitable abbots, and had undergone little change since their time, except in regard to furniture; and even that appeared old and faded now. What with the gloomy arras, the shrouded bedstead, and the Gothic wardrobe with its mysterious figures, the chamber had a grim, ghostly air, and so the young girl thought, on entering it.

"I have brought you hither, Alizon," said Mistress Nutter, motioning her to a seat, "that we may converse without chance of interruption, for I have much to say. On first seeing you to-day, your appearance, so superior to the rest of the May Day mummers, struck me forcibly, and I resolved to question Elizabeth Device about you. Accordingly, I bade her join me in the Abbey gardens. She did so, and had not long left me when I accidentally met you and the others in the Lacy Chapel. When questioned, Elizabeth affected great surprise, and denied positively that there was any foundation for the idea, that you were other than her child; but, notwithstanding her asseverations, I could see from her confused manner that there was more in the notion than she chose to admit, and I determined to have recourse to other means of arriving at the truth, little expecting my suspicions would be so soon confirmed by Mother Chattox. To my interrogation of that old woman, you were yourself a party, and I am now rejoiced that you interfered to prevent

me from prosecuting my inquiries to the utmost. There was one present from whom the secret of your birth must be strictly kept — at least, for awhile — and my impatience carried me too far."

"I only obeyed a natural impulse, Madam," said Alizon; "but I am at a loss to conceive what claim I can possibly have to the consideration you show me?"

"Listen to me, and you shall learn," replied Mistress Nutter. "It is a sad tale, and its recital will tear open old wounds, but it must not be withheld on that account. I do not ask you to bury the secrets I am about to impart in the recesses of your bosom. You will do so when you learn them, without my telling you. When little more than your age I was wedded; but not to him I would have chosen, if choice had been permitted me. The union I need scarcely say was unhappy — most unhappy — though my discomforts were scrupulously concealed, and I was looked upon as a devoted wife, and my husband as a model of conjugal affection. But this was merely the surface — internally all was strife and misery. Ere long my dislike of my husband increased to absolute hate, while on his part, though he still regarded me with as much passion as heretofore, he became frantically jealous — and above all of Edward Braddyll, of Portfield, who as his bosom friend, and my distant relative, was a frequent visitor at the house. To relate the numerous exhibitions of jealousy that occurred would answer little purpose, and it will be enough to say that not a word or look passed between Edward and myself but was misconstrued. I took care never to be alone with our guest — nor to give any just ground for suspicion — but my caution availed nothing. An easy remedy would have been to forbid Edward the house, but this my husband's pride rejected. He preferred to endure the jealous torment occasioned by the presence of his

wife's fancied lover, and inflict needless anguish on her rather than brook the jeers of a few indifferent acquaintances. The same feeling made him desire to keep up an apparent good understanding with me; and so far I seconded his views, for I shared in his pride, if in nothing else. Our quarrels were all in private, when no eye could see us — no ear listen."

"Yours is a melancholy history, Madam," remarked Alizon, in a tone of profound interest.

"You will think so ere I have done," returned the lady, sadly. "The only person in my confidence, and aware of my secret sorrows, was Elizabeth Device, who with her husband, John Device, then lived at Rough Lee. Serving me in the quality of tire-woman and personal attendant, she could not be kept in ignorance of what took place, and the poor soul offered me all the sympathy in her power. Much was it needed, for I had no other sympathy. After awhile, I know not from what cause, unless from some imprudence on the part of Edward Braddyll, who was wild and reckless, my husband conceived worse suspicions than ever of me, and began to treat me with such harshness and cruelty, that, unable longer to endure his violence, I appealed to my father. But he was of a stern and arbitrary nature, and having forced me into the match, would not listen to my complaints, but bade me submit. 'It was my duty to do so,' he said, and he added some cutting expressions to the effect that I deserved the treatment I experienced, and dismissed me. Driven to desperation I sought counsel and assistance from one I should most have avoided — from Edward Braddyll — and he proposed flight from my husband's roof — flight with him."

"But you were saved, Madam?" cried Alizon, greatly shocked by the narration. "You were saved?"

"Hear me out," rejoined Mistress Nutter. "Outraged as

my feelings were, and loathsome as my husband was to me, I spurned the base proposal, and instantly quitted my false friend. Nor would I have seen him more, if permitted; but that secret interview with him was my first and last; — for it had been witnessed by my husband."

"Ha!" exclaimed Alizon.

"Concealed behind the arras, Richard Nutter heard enough to confirm his worst suspicions," pursued the lady, "but he did not hear my justification. He saw Edward Braddyll at my feet — he heard him urge me to fly — but he did not wait to learn if I consented, and looking upon me as guilty, left his hiding-place, to take measures for frustrating the plan he supposed concerted between us. That night I was made prisoner in my room, and endured treatment the most inhuman. But a proposal was made by my husband, that promised some alleviation of my suffering. Henceforth we were to meet only in public, when a semblance of affection was to be maintained on both sides. This was done, he said, to save my character, and preserve his own name unspotted in the eyes of others, however tarnished it might be in his own. I willingly consented to the arrangement; and thus, for a brief space, I became tranquil, if not happy. But another and severer trial awaited me."

"Alas, Madam!" exclaimed Alizon, sympathisingly.

"My cup of sorrow, I thought, was full," pursued Mistress Nutter, "but the drop was wanting to make it overflow. It came soon enough. Amidst my griefs, I expected to be a mother, and with that thought how many fond and cheering anticipations mingled! In my child I hoped to find a balm for my woes: in its smiles and innocent endearments a compensation for the harshness and injustice I had experienced. How little did I foresee that it was to be a new instrument of

torture to me; and that I should be cruelly robbed of the only blessing ever vouchsafed me!"

"Did the child die, Madam?" asked Alizon.

"You shall hear," replied Mistress Nutter. "A daughter was born to me. I was made happy by its birth. A new existence, bright and unclouded, seemed dawning upon me; but it was like a sun-burst on a stormy day. Some two months before this event, Elizabeth Device had given birth to a daughter, and she now took my child under her fostering care, for weakness prevented me from affording it the support it is a mother's blessed privilege to bestow. She seemed as fond of it as myself; and never was babe more calculated to win love than my little Millicent. Oh! how shall I go on! The restrospect I am compelled to take is frightful, but I cannot shun it. The foul and false suspicions entertained by my husband began to settle on the child. He would not believe it to be his own. With violent oaths and threats he first announced his odious suspicions to Elizabeth Device, and she full of terror communicated them to me. The tidings filled me with inexpressible alarm, for I knew if the dread idea had once taken possession of him it would never be removed, while what he threatened would be executed. I would have fled at once with my poor babe if I had known where to go; but I had no place of shelter. It would be in vain to seek refuge with my father; and I had no other relative or friend whom I could trust. Where then should I fly? At last I bethought me of a retreat, and arranged a plan of escape with Elizabeth Device. Vain were my precautions. On that very night, I was startled from slumber by a sudden cry from the nurse, who was seated by the fire, with the child on her knees. It was long past midnight, and all the household were at rest. Two persons had entered the room. One was my ruthless husband, Richard Nutter; the

other was John Device, a powerful, ruffianly fellow, who planted himself near the door.

"Marching quickly towards Elizabeth, who had arisen on seeing him, my husband snatched the child from her before I could seize it, and with a violent blow on the chest felled me to the ground, where I lay helpless, speechless. With reeling senses I heard Elizabeth cry out that it was her own child, and call upon her husband to save it. Richard Nutter paused, but re-assured by a laugh of disbelief from his ruffianly follower, he told Elizabeth the pitiful excuse would not avail to save the brat. And then I saw a weapon gleam — there was a feeble piteous cry — a cry that might have moved a demon — but it did not move *him*. With wicked words and blood-imbrued hands he cast the body on the fire. The horrid sight was too much for me, and I became senseless."

"A dreadful tale, indeed, Madam!" cried Alizon, frozen with horror.

"The crime was hidden — hidden from the eyes of men — but mark the retribution that followed," said Mistress Nutter, her eyes sparkling with vindictive joy. "Of the two murderers both perished miserably. John Device was drowned in a moss pool. Richard Nutter's end was terrible, sharpened by the pangs of remorse, and marked by frightful suffering. But another dark event preceded his death, which may have laid a crime the more on his already heavily-burdened soul. Edward Braddyll, the object of his jealousy and hate, suddenly sickened of a malady so strange and fearful that all who saw him affirmed it the result of witchcraft. None thought of my husband's agency in the dark affair except myself, but knowing he had held many secret conferences about the time with Mother Chattox, I more than suspected him. The sick man died. And from that hour Richard Nutter knew no rest.

Ever on horseback, or fiercely carousing, he sought in vain to stifle remorse. Visions scared him by night, and vague fears pursued him by day. He would start at shadows and talk wildly. To me his whole demeanour was altered; and he strove by every means in his power to win my love. But he could not give me back the treasure he had taken. He could not bring to life my murdered babe. Like his victim, he fell ill on a sudden, and of a strange and terrible sickness. I saw he could not recover, and therefore tended him carefully. He died; and I shed no tear."

"Alas!" exclaimed Alizon, "though guilty, I cannot but compassionate him."

"You are right to do so, Alizon," said Mistress Nutter, rising, while the young girl rose too; "for he was your father."

"My father!" she exclaimed, in amazement. "Then you are my mother?"

"I am — I am," replied Mistress Nutter, straining her to her bosom. "Oh, my child! — my dear child!" she cried. "The voice of nature from the first pleaded eloquently in your behalf, and I should have been deaf to all impulses of affection if I had not listened to the call. I now trace in every feature the lineaments of the babe I thought lost for ever. All is clear to me. The exclamation of Elizabeth Device, which, like my ruthless husband, I looked upon as an artifice to save the infant's life, I now find to be the truth. Her child perished instead of mine. How or why she exchanged the infants on that night remains to be explained, but that she did so is certain; while that she should afterwards conceal the circumstance is easily comprehended, from a natural dread of her own husband as well as of mine. It is possible from some cause she may still deny the truth, but I can make ither interest to speak plainly. The main difficulty will lie in

my public acknowledgment of you. But at whatever cost, it shall be made."

"Oh! consider it well," said Alizon. "I will be your daughter in love — in duty — in all but name. But sully not my poor father's honour, which even at the peril of his soul he sought to maintain! How can I be owned as your daughter without involving the discovery of this tragic history?"

"You are right, Alizon," rejoined Mistress Nutter, thoughtfully. "It will bring the dark deed to light. But you shall never return to Elizabeth Device. You shall go with me to Rough Lee, and take up your abode in the house where I was once so wretched — but where I shall now be full of happiness with you. You shall see the dark spots on the hearth, which I took to be your blood."

"If not mine it was blood spilt by my father," said Alizon, with a shudder.

Was it fancy, or did a low groan break upon her ear? It must be imaginary, for Mistress Nutter seemed unconscious of the dismal sound. It was now growing rapidly dark, and the more distant objects in the room were wrapped in obscurity; but Alizon's gaze rested on the two monkish figures supporting the wardrobe.

"Look there, mother," she said to Mistress Nutter.

"Where?" cried the lady, turning round quickly, "Ah! I see. You alarm yourself needlessly, my child. Those are only carved figures of two brethren of the Abbey. They are said — I know not with what truth — to be statues of John Paslew and Borlace Alvetham."

"I thought they stirred," said Alizon.

"It was mere fancy," replied Mistress Nutter. "Calm yourself, sweet child. Let us think of other things — of our newly-discovered relationship. Henceforth, to me you are Millicent Nutter; though to others, you must still be Alizon

Device. My sweet Millicent," she cried, embracing her again and again, "Ah, little, little did I think to see you more!"

Alizon's fears were speedily chased away.

"Forgive me, dear mother," she cried, "if I have failed to express the full delight I experience in my restitution to you. The shock of your sad tale at first deadened my joy, while the suddenness of the information respecting myself so overwhelmed me, that like one chancing upon a hidden treasure, and gazing at it confounded, I was unable to credit my own good fortune. Even now I am quite bewildered; and no wonder, for many thoughts, each of different import, throng upon me. Independently of the pleasure and natural pride I must feel in being acknowledged by you as a daughter, it is a source of the deepest satisfaction to me to know that I am not, in any way, connected with Elizabeth Device — not from her humble station — for poverty weighs little with me in comparison with virtue and goodness — but from her sinfulness. You know the dark offence laid to her charge?"

"I do," replied Mistress Nutter, in a low deep tone; "but I do not believe it."

"Nor I," returned Alizon. "Still, she acts as if she were the wicked thing she is called; avoids all religious offices; shuns all places of worship; and derides the Holy Scriptures. Oh! mother, you will comprehend the frequent conflict of feelings I must have endured. You will understand my horror when I have sometimes thought myself the daughter of a witch."

"Why did you not leave her if you thought so?" said Mistress Nutter, frowning.

"I could not leave her," replied Alizon, "for I then thought her my mother."

Mistress Nutter fell upon her daughter's neck, and wept aloud.

"You have an excellent heart, my child," she said, at length, checking her emotion.

"I have nothing to complain of in Elizabeth Device, dear mother," she replied. "What she denied herself, she did not refuse me; and though I have necessarily many and great deficiencies, you will find in me, I trust, no evil principles. And, oh! shall we not strive to rescue that poor benighted creature from the pit? We may yet save her."

"It is too late," replied Mistress Nutter, in a sombre tone.

"It cannot be too late," said Alizon, confidently. "She cannot be beyond redemption. But even if she should prove intractable, poor little Jennet may be preserved. She is yet a child, with some good — though, alas! much evil, also, in her nature. Let our united efforts be exerted in this good work, and we must succeed. The weeds extirpated, the flowers will spring up freely, and bloom in beauty."

"I can have nothing to do with her," said Mistress Nutter, in a freezing tone, — "nor must you."

"Oh! say not so, mother," cried Alizon. "You rob me of half the happiness I feel in being restored to you. When I was Jennet's sister, I devoted myself to the task of reclaiming her. I hoped to be her guardian angel — to step between her and the assaults of evil — and I cannot, will not, now abandon her. If no longer my sister, she is still dear to me. And recollect that I owe a deep debt of gratitude to her mother — a debt I can never pay."

"How so?" cried Mistress Nutter. "You owe her nothing — but the contrary."

"I owe her a life," said Alizon. "Was not her infant's blood poured out for mine! And shall I not save the child left her, if I can?"

"I shall not oppose your inclinations," replied Mistress Nutter, with reluctant assent; "but Elizabeth, I suspect, will thank you little for your interference."

"Not now, perhaps," returned Alizon; "but a time will come when she will do so."

While this conversation took place, it had been rapidly growing dark, and the gloom, at length, increased so much, that the speakers could scarcely see each other's faces. The sudden and portentous darkness was accounted for, by a vidid flash of lightning, followed by a low growl of thunder, rumbling over Whalley Nab. The mother and daughter drew close together, and Mistress Nutter passed her arm round Alizon's neck.

The storm came quickly on, with forked and dangerous lightning, and loud claps of thunder threatening mischief. Presently, all its fury seemed collected over the Abbey. The red flashes hissed, and the peals of thunder rolled over head. But other terrors were added to Alizon's natural dread of the elemental warfare. Again she fancied the two monkish figures which had before excited her alarm, moved, and even shook their arms menacingly at her. At first she attributed this wild idea to her overwrought imagination, and strove to convince herself of its fallacy by keeping her eyes steadily fixed upon them. But each succeeding flash only served to confirm her superstitious apprehensions.

Another circumstance contributed to heighten her alarm. Scared most probably by the storm, a large white owl fluttered down the chimney, and after wheeling twice or thrice round the chamber, settled upon the bed, hooting, puffing, ruffling its feathers, and glaring at her with eyes that glowed like fiery coals.

Mistress Nutter seemed little moved by the storm, though she kept a profound silence, but when Alizon gazed in her

face she was frightened by its expression, which reminded her of the terrible aspect she had worn at the interview with Mother Chattox.

All at once, Mistress Nutter arose, and, rapid as the lightning playing around her and revealing her movements, made several passes, with extended hands, over her daughter; and on this the latter instantly fell back, as if fainting, though still retaining her consciousness, and what was stranger still, though her eyes were closed, her power of sight remained.

In this condition she fancied invisible forms were moving about her. Strange sounds seemed to salute her ears, like the gibbering of ghosts, and she thought she felt the flapping of unseen wings around her.

All at once her attention was drawn — she knew not why — towards the closet, and from out it she fancied she saw issue the tall dark figure of a man. She was sure she saw him, for her imagination could not body forth features charged with such a fiendish expression, or eyes of such unearthly lustre. He was clothed in black, but the fashion of his raiments was unlike aught she had ever seen. His stature was gigantic, and a pale phosphoric light enshrouded him. As he advanced forked lightnings shot into the room, and the thunder split overhead. The owl hooted fearfully, quitted its perch, and flew off by the way it had entered the chamber.

The Dark Shape came on. It stood beside Mistress Nutter, and she prostrated herself before it. The gestures of the figure were angry and imperious — those of Mistress Nutter supplicating. Their converse was drowned by the rattling of the storm. At last the figure pointed to Alizon, and the word "Midnight" broke in tones louder than the thunder from its lips. All consciousness then forsook her.

How long she continued in this state she knew not, but the touch of a finger applied to her brow seemed to reach her

suddenly to animation. She heaved a deep sigh, and looked around. A wondrous change had occurred. The storm had passed off, and the moon was shining brightly over the top of the cypress tree, flooding the chamber with its gentle radiance, while her mother was bending over her with looks of tenderest affection.

"You are better now, sweet child," said Mistress Nutter. "You were overcome by the storm. It was sudden and terrible."

"Terrible indeed!" replied Alizon, imperfectly recalling what had passed. "But it was not alone the storm that frightened me. This chamber has been invaded by evil beings. Methought I beheld a dark figure come from out yon closet, and stand before you?"

"You have been thrown into a state of stupor by the influence of the electric fluid," replied Mistress Nutter, "and while in that condition visions have passed through your brain. That is all, my child."

"Oh! I hope so," said Alizon.

"Such ecstacies are of frequent occurrence," replied Mistress Nutter. "But since you are quite recovered, we will descend to Lady Assheton, who may wonder at our absence. You will share this room with me to-night, my child, for as I have already said, you cannot return to Elizabeth Device. I will make all needful explanations to Lady Assheton, and will see Elizabeth in the morning — perhaps, to-night. Re-assure yourself, sweet child. There is nothing to fear."

"I trust not, mother," replied Alizon. "But it would ease my mind to look into that closet?"

"Do so, then, by all means," replied Mistress Nutter, with a forced smile.

Alizon peeped timorously into the little room, which was

lighted up by the moon's rays. There was a faded white habit like the robe of a Cistertian monk hanging in one corner, and beneath it an old chest. Alizon would fain have opened the chest, but Mistress Nutter called out to her impatiently, "You will discover nothing, I am sure. Come, let us go down stairs."

And they quitted the room together.

CHAPTER IX.

The two portraits in the banqueting-hall.

THE banqueting-hall lay immediately under the long gallery, corresponding with it in all but height; and though in this respect it fell somewhat short of the magnificent upper room, it was quite lofty enough to admit of a gallery of its own for spectators and minstrels. Great pains had been taken in decorating the hall for the occasion. Between the forest of stags' horns that branched from the gallery rails were hung rich carpets, intermixed with garlands of flowers, and banners painted with the arms of the Assheton family, were suspended from the corners. Over the fire-place, where despite the advanced season, a pile of turf and wood was burning, were hung two panoplies of arms, and above them, on a bracket was set a complete suit of mail, once belonging to Richard Assheton, the first possessor of the mansion. On the opposite wall hung two remarkable portraits, — the one representing a religious votaress in a loose robe of black, with wide sleeves, holding a rosary and missal in her hand, and having her brow and neck entirely concealed by the wimple, in which her head and shoulders were enveloped. Such of her features as could be seen were of extraordinary loveliness, though of a voluptuous character, the eyes being dark and languishing, and shaded by long lashes, and the lips carna-

tion-hued and full. This was the fair votaress Isole de Heton, who brought such scandal on the Abbey in the reign of Henry VI. The other portrait was that of an abbot, in the white gown and scapulary of the Cistertian order. The countenance was proud and stern, but tinctured with melancholy. In a small shield at one corner the arms were blazoned — argent, a fess between three mullets, sable, pierced of the field, a crescent for difference — proving it to be the portrait of John Paslew. Both pictures had been found in the Abbot's lodgings, when taken possession of by Richard Assheton, but they owed their present position to his descendant, Sir Ralph, who discovering them in an out-of-the-way closet, where they had been cast aside, and struck with their extraordinary merit, hung them up as above stated.

The long oaken table, usually standing in the middle of the hall, had been removed to one side, to allow free scope for dancing and other pastimes, but it was still devoted to hospitable uses, being covered with trenchers and drinking-cups, and spread for a substantial repast. Near it stood two carvers, with aprons round their waists, brandishing long knives, while other yeomen of the kitchen and cellar were at hand to keep the trenchers well supplied, and the cups filled with strong ale, or bragget, as might suit the taste of the guests. Nor were these the only festive preparations. The upper part of the hall was reserved for Sir Ralph's immediate friends, and here, on a slightly-raised elevation, stood a cross table, spread for a goodly supper, the snowy napery being ornamented with wreaths and ropes of flowers, and shining with costly vessels. At the lower end of the room, beneath the gallery, which it served to support, was a Gothic screen, embellishing an open armory, which made a grand display of silver plates and flagons. Through one of the

doorways contrived in this screen the May Day revellers were ushered into the hall by old Adam Whitworth, the white-headed steward.

"I pray you be seated, good masters, and you too, comely dames," said Adam, leading them to the table, and assigning each a place with his wand. "Fall to, and spare not, for it is my honoured master's desire you should sup well. You will find that venison pasty worth a trial, and the baked red deer in the centre of the table is a noble dish. The fellow to it was served at Sir Ralph's own table at dinner, and was pronounced excellent. I pray you try it, masters. — Here Ned Scargill, mind your office, good fellow, and break me that deer. And you, Paul Pimlot, exercise your craft on the venison pasty."

And as trencher after trencher was rapidly filled by the two carvers, who demeaned themselves in their task like men acquainted with the powers of rustic appetite, the old steward addressed himself to the dames.

"What can I do for you, fair mistresses?" he said. "Here be sack possets, junkets and cream, for such as like them — French puffs and Italian puddings, right good, I warrant you, and especially admired by my honourable good lady. Indeed, I am not sure she hath not lent a hand herself in their preparation. Then here be fritters in the court fashion, made with curds of sack posset, eggs, and ale, and seasoned with nutmeg and pepper. You will taste them, I am sure, for they are favourites with our sovereign lady, the Queen. Here, Gregory, Dickon — bestir yourselves, knaves, and pour forth a cup of sack for each of these dames. As you drink, mistresses, neglect not the health of our honourable good master Sir Ralph and his lady. It is well — it is well. I will convey to them both your dutiful good wishes. But I must see all your wants supplied. Good Dame Openshaw, you

have nought before you. Be prevailed upon to taste these dropt raisins or a fond pudding. And you, too, sweet Dame Tetlow. Squire Nicholas gave me special caution to take care of you, but the injunction was unneeded, as I should have done so without it. — Another cup of canary to Dame Tetlow, Gregory. Fill to the brim, knave — to the very brim. To the health of Squire Nicholas," he added, in a low tone, as he handed the brimming goblet to the blushing dame; "and be sure and tell him, if he questions you, that I obeyed his behests to the best of my ability. I pray you taste this pippin jelly, dame. It is as red as rubies, but not so red as your lips; or some leach of almonds, which, lily white though it be, is not to be compared with the teeth that shall touch it."

"Odd's heart! mester steward, yo mun ha' larnt that pretty speech fro' th' squoire himself," replied Dame Tetlow, laughing.

"It may be the recollection of something said to me by him, brought to mind by your presence," replied Adam Whitworth, gallantly. "If I can serve you in aught else, sign to me, dame. — Now knaves, fill the cups — ale or bragget, at your pleasure, masters. Drink and stint not, and you will the better please your liberal entertainer and my honoured master."

Thus exhorted, the guests set seriously to work to fulfil the hospitable intentions of the provider of the feast. Cups flowed fast and freely, and ere long little was left of the venison pasty but the outer crust, and nothing more than a few fragments of the baked red deer. The lighter articles then came in for a share of attention, and salmon from the Ribble, jack, trout, and eels from the Hodder and Calder, boiled, broiled, stewed, and pickled, and of delicious flavour, were discussed with infinite relish. Puddings and pastry were

left to more delicate stomachs, — the solids only being in request with the men. Hitherto, the demolition of the viands had given sufficient employment, but now the edge of appetite beginning to be dulled, tongues were unloosed, and much merriment prevailed. More than eighty in number, the guests were dispersed without any regard to order, and thus the chief actors in the revel were scattered promiscuously about the table, diversifying it with their gay costumes. Robin Hood sat between two pretty female morris-dancers, whose partners had got to the other end of the table; while Ned Huddlestone, the representative of Friar Tuck, was equally fortunate, having a buxom dame on either side of him, towards whom he distributed his favours with singular impartiality. As porter to the Abbey, Ned made himself at home; and, next to Adam Whitworth, was perhaps the most important personage present; continually roaring for ale, and pledging the damsels around him. From the way he went on, it seemed highly probable, he would be under the table before supper was over; but Ned Huddlestone, like the burly priest, whose gown he wore, had a stout bullet head, proof against all assaults of liquor; and the copious draughts he swallowed, instead of subduing him, only tended to make him more uproarious. Blessed also with lusty lungs his shouts of laughter made the roof ring again. But if the strong liquor failed to make due impression upon him, the like cannot be said of Jack Roby, who, it will be remembered, took the part of the Fool, and who, having drunk overmuch, mistook the hobby-horse for a real steed, and in an effort to bestride it, fell headforemost on the floor, and being found incapable of rising, was carried out to an adjoining room, and laid on a bench. This, however, was the only case of excess, for though the Sherwood foresters emptied their cups often enough to heighten their mirth, none of them seemed

the worse for what they drank. Lawrence Blackrod, Mr. Parker's keeper, had fortunately got next to his old flame, Sukey Worseley; while Phil Rawson, the forester, who enacted Will Scarlet, and Nancy Holt, between whom an equally tender feeling subsisted, had likewise got together. A little beyond them sat the gentleman usher, and parish clerk, Sampson Harrop, who piquing himself on his good manners, drank very sparingly, and was content to sup on sweetmeats and a bowl of fleetings, as curds separated from whey are termed in this district. Tom the piper and his companion, the taborer, ate for the next week, but were somewhat more sparing in the matter of drink, their services as minstrels being required later on. Thus the various guests enjoyed themselves according to their bent, and universal hilarity prevailed. It would be strange indeed if it had been otherwise, for what with the good cheer, and the bright eyes around them, the rustics had attained a point of felicity not likely to be surpassed. Of the numerous assemblage more than half were of the fairer sex; and of these the greater portion were young and good looking, while in the case of the morris-dancers, their natural charms were heightened by their fanciful attire.

Before supper was half over it became so dark that it was found necessary to illuminate the great lamp suspended from the centre of the roof, while other lights were set on the board, and two flaming torches placed in sockets on either side of the chimney-piece. Scarcely was this accomplished when the storm came on, much to the surprise of the weather-wise, who had not calculated upon such an occurrence, not having seen any indications whatever of it in the heavens. But all were too comfortably sheltered, and too well employed to pay much attention to what was going on without, and, unless when a flash of lightning more than usually vivid

dazzled the gaze, or a peal of thunder more appalling than the rest broke overhead, no alarm was expressed, even by the women. To be sure, a little pretty trepidation was now and then evinced by the younger damsels, but even this was only done with the view of exacting attention on the part of their swains, and never failed in effect. The thunder-storm, therefore, instead of putting a stop to the general enjoyment, only tended to increase it. However, the last peal was loud enough to silence the most uproarious. The women turned pale, and the men looked at each other anxiously, listening to hear if any damage had been done. But as nothing transpired, their spirits revived. A few minutes afterwards word was brought that the Conventual Church had been struck by a thunder-bolt, but this was not regarded as a very serious disaster. The bearer of the intelligence was little Jennet, who said she had been caught in the ruins by the storm, and after being dreadfully frightened by the lightning, had seen a bolt strike the steeple, and heard some stones rattle down, after which she ran away. No one thought of inquiring what she had been doing there at the time, but room was made for her at the supper table next to Sampson Harrop, while the good steward patting her on the head, filled her a cup of canary with his own hand, and gave her some cates to eat.

"Ey dunna see Alizon," observed the little girl, looking round the table, after she had drunk the wine.

"Your sister is not here, Jennet," replied Adam Whitworth, with a smile. "She is too great a lady for us now. Since she came up with her ladyship from the green she has been treated quite like one of the guests, and has been walking about the garden and ruins all the afternoon with young Mistress Dorothy, who has taken quite a fancy to her. Indeed, for the matter of that, all the ladies seem to have taken a

fancy to her, and she is now closeted with Mistress Nutter in her own room."

This was gall and wormwood to Jennet.

"She 'll be hard to please when she goes home again, after playing the fine dame here," pursued the steward.

"Then ey hope she 'll never come home again," rejoined Jennet, spitefully, "fo' we dunna want fine dames i' our poor cottage."

"For my part I do not wonder Alizon pleases the gentle folks," observed Sampson Harrop, "since such pains have been taken with her manners and education; and I must say she does great credit to her instructor, who for reasons unnecessary to mention, shall be nameless. I wish I could say the same for you, Jennet; but though you 're not deficient in ability you 've no perseverance or pleasure in study."

"Ey knoa os much os ey care to knoa," replied Jennet, "an more than yo con teach me, Mester Harrop. Why is Alizon always to be thrown i' my teeth?"

"Because she 's the best model you can have," rejoined Sampson. "Ah, if I'd my own way wi' ye, lass, I 'd mend your temper and manners. But you come of an ill stock, ye saucy hussey."

"Ey come fro' th' same stock as Alizon, onny how," said Jennet.

"Unluckily, that cannot be denied," replied Sampson; "but you 're as different from her as light from darkness."

Jennet eyed him bitterly, and then rose from the table.

"Ey'n go," she said.

"No — no; sit down," interposed the good-natured steward. "The dancing and pastimes will begin presently, and you will see your sister. She will come down with the ladies."

"That 's the very reason she wishes to go," said Sampson

Harrop. "The spiteful little creature cannot bear to see her sister better treated than herself. Go your ways, then. It is the best thing you can do. Alizon would blush to see you here."

"Then ey'n een stay an vex her," replied Jennet, sharply; "boh ey winna sit near yo onny longer, Mester Sampson Harrop, who ca' yersel gentleman usher, boh who are nah gentleman at aw, nor owt like it, boh merely parish clerk an schoolmester, an a poor schoolmester to boot. Eyn go an sit by Sukey Worseley an Nancy Holt, whom ey see yonder."

"You 've found your match, Master Harrop," said the steward, laughing, as the little girl walked away.

"I should account it a disgrace to bandy words with the like of her, Adam," rejoined the clerk, angrily; "but I 'm greatly out in my reckoning, if she does not make a second Mother Demdike, and worse could not well befal her."

Jennet's society could have been very well dispensed with by her two friends, but she would not be shaken off. On the contrary, finding herself in the way, she only determined the more pertinaciously to remain, and began to exercise all her powers of teasing, which have been described as considerable, and which on this occasion proved eminently successful. And the worst of it was, there was no crushing the plaguy little insect; any effort made to catch her only resulting in an escape on her part, and a new charge on some undefended quarter, with sharper stinging and more intolerable buzzing than ever.

Out of all patience, Sukey Worseley at length exclaimed "Ey should loike to see ye swum, crosswise, i' th' Calder, Jennet, as Nance Redferne war this efternoon."

"May be ye would, Sukey," replied the little girl, "boh eym nah so likely to be tried that way as yourself, lass; an if ey war swum ey should sink, while yo, wi' your broad back

and shouthers, would be sure to float, an then yo'd be counted a witch."

"Heed her not, Sukey," said Blackrod, unable to resist a laugh, though the poor girl was greatly discomfited by this personal allusion, "ye may ha' a broad back o' our own, an the broader the better to my mind, boh mey word on't ye 'll never be ta'en fo a witch. Yo 're far too comely."

This assurance was a balm to poor Sukey's wounded spirit, and she replied with a well-pleased smile, "Ey hope ey dunna look like one, Lorry."

"Not a bit, lass," said Blackrod, lifting a huge ale-cup to his lips. "Your health, sweetheart."

"What think ye then o' Nance Redferne?" observed Jennet. "Is she neaw comely? — ay, comelier far than fat, fubsy Sukey here — or than Nancy Holt wi' her yallo hure an frecklet feace — an yet ye ca' her a witch."

"Ey ca' thee one, theaw feaw little whean — an the dowter — an grandowter o' one — an that 's more," cried Nancy. "Freckles i' your own feace, ye mismannert minx."

"Ne'er heed her, Nance," said Phil Rawson, putting his arm round the angry damsel's waist, and drawing her gently down. "Every one to his taste, an freckles an yellow hure are so to mine. So dunna fret about it, an spoil your protty lips wi' pouting. Better ha' freckles o' your feace than spots o' your heart loike that ill-favort little hussey."

"Dunna offend her, Phil," said Nancy Holt, noticing with alarm the malignant look fixed upon her lover by Jennet. "She 's dawngerous."

"Firrups tak her!" replied Phil Rawson. "Boh who the dule 's that? Ey didna notice him efore, an he 's neaw one o' our party."

The latter observation was occasioned by the entrance of a tall personage, in the garb of a Cistertian monk, who issued

from one of the doorways in the screen, and glided towards the upper table, attracting general attention and misgiving as he proceeded. His countenance was cadaverous, his lips livid, and his eyes black and deep sunken in their sockets, with a bistre-coloured circle around them. His frame was meagre and bony. What remained of hair on his head was raven black, but either he was bald on the crown, or carried his attention to costume so far as to adopt the priestly tonsure. His forehead was lofty and sallow, and seemed stamped, like his features, with profound gloom. His garments were faded and mouldering, and materially contributed to his ghostly appearance.

"Who is it?" cried Sukey and Nance together.

But no one could answer the question.

"He dusna look loike a bein' o' this warld," observed Blackrod, gaping with alarm, for the stout keeper was easily assailable on the side of superstition; "an there is a mowdy air about him that gies one the shivers to see. Ey 've often heer'd say the Abbey is haanted; an that pale-feaced chap looks like one o' th' owd monks risen fro' his grave to join our revel."

"An see, he looks this way," cried Phil Rawson. "What flaming een! they mey the very flesh crawl o' one's booans."

"Is it a ghost, Lorry?" said Sukey, drawing nearer to the stalwart keeper.

"By th' maskins, lass, ey conna tell," replied Blackrod; "boh whotever it be, ey 'll protect ye."

"Tak care o' me, Phil," ejaculated Nancy Holt, pressing close to her lover's side.

"Eigh, that I win," rejoined the forester.

"Ey dunna care for ghosts so long os yo are near me, Phil," said Nancy, tenderly.

"Then ey'n never leave ye, Nance," replied Phil.

"Ghost or not," said Jennet, who had been occupied in

regarding the new comer attentively, "ey'n go an speak to it. Ey'm nah afeerd, if yo are."

"Eigh do, Jennet, that 's a brave little lass," said Blackrod, glad to be rid of her in any way.

"Stay!" cried Adam Whitworth, coming up at the moment, and overhearing what was said — "you must not go near the gentleman. I will not have him molested, or even spoken with, till Sir Ralph appears."

Meanwhile, the stranger without returning the glances fixed upon him, or deigning to notice any of the companyt pursued his way, and sat down in a chair at the upper table.

But his entrance had been witnessed by others besides the rustic guests and servitors. Nicholas and Richard Assheton chanced to be in the gallery at the time, and greatly struck by the singularity of his appearance, immediately descended to make inquiries respecting him. As they appeared below, the old steward advanced to meet them.

"Who the devil have you got there, Adam?" asked the squire.

"It passeth me almost to tell you, Master Nicholas," replied the steward; "and not knowing whether the gentleman be invited or not, I am fain to wait Sir Ralph's pleasure in regard to him."

"Have you no notion who he is?" inquired Richard.

"All I know about him may be soon told, Master Richard," replied Adam. "He is a stranger in these parts, and hath very recently taken up his abode in Wiswall Hall, which has been abandoned of late years, as you know, and suffered to go to decay. Some few months ago an aged couple from Colne, named Hewit, took possession of part of the hall, and were suffered to remain there, though old Katty Hewit, or Mouldheels, as she is familiarly termed by the common folk, is in no very good repute hereabouts, and was driven, it is

said, from Colne, owing to her practices as a witch. Be that as it may, soon after these Hewits were settled at Wiswall, comes this stranger, and fixes himself in another part of the hall. How he lives no one can tell, but it is said he rambles all night long, like a troubled spirit, about the deserted rooms, attended by Mother Mouldheels; while in the day time he is never seen."

"Can he be of sound mind?" asked Richard.

"Hardly so, I should think, Master Richard," replied the steward. "As to who he may be there are many opinions; and some aver he is Francis Paslew, grandson of Francis, brother to the Abbot, and being a Jesuit priest, for you know the Paslews have all strictly adhered to the old faith, — and that is why they have fled the country and abandoned their residence, — he is obliged to keep himself concealed."

"If such be the case, he must be crazed indeed to venture here," observed Nicholas; "and yet I am half inclined to credit the report. Look at him, Dick. He is the very image of the old Abbot."

"Yon portrait might have been painted for him," said Richard, gazing at the picture on the wall, and from it to the monk as he spoke, "the very same garb, too."

"There is an old monastic robe up stairs in the closet adjoining the room occupied by Mistress Nutter," observed the steward, "said to be the garment in which Abbot Paslew suffered death. Some stains are upon it, supposed to be the blood of the wizard Demdike, who perished in an extraordinary manner on the same day."

"I have seen it," cried Nicholas, "and the monk's habit looks precisely like it, and if my eyes deceive me not, is stained in the same manner."

"I see the spots plainly on the breast," cried Richard. "How can he have procured the robe?"

"Heaven only knows," replied the old steward. "It is a very strange occurrence."

"I will go question him," said Richard.

So saying, he proceeded to the upper table, accompanied by Nicholas. As they drew near, the stranger arose, and fixed a grim look upon Richard, who was a little in advance.

"It is the Abbot's ghost!" cried Nicholas, stopping, and detaining his cousin. "You shall not address it."

During the contention that ensued, the monk glided towards a side door at the upper end of the hall, and passed through it. So general was the consternation, that no one attempted to stay him, nor would any one follow to see whither he went. Released, at length, from the strong grasp of the squire, Richard rushed forth, and not returning, Nicholas, after the lapse of a few minutes, went in search of him, but came back presently, and told the old steward he could neither find him nor the monk.

"Master Richard will be back anon, I dare say, Adam," he remarked; "if not, I will make further search for him, but you had better not mention this mysterious occurrence to Sir Ralph, at all events, not until the festivities are over, and the ladies have retired. It might disturb them. I fear the appearance of this monk bodes no good to our family; and what makes it worse is, it is not the first ill omen that has befallen us to-day. Master Richard was unlucky enough to stand on Abbot Paslew's grave!"

"Mercy on us! that was unlucky indeed!" cried Adam, in great trepidation. "Poor dear young gentleman. Bid him take especial care of himself, good Master Nicholas. I noticed just now, that yon fearsome monk regarded him more attentively than you. Bid him be careful, I conjure you, Sir. But here comes my honoured master and his guests. Here, Gre-

gory, Dickon, bestir yourselves, knaves; and serve supper at the upper table in a trice."

Any apprehensions Nicholas might entertain for Richard were at this moment relieved, for as Sir Ralph and his guests came in at one door, the young man entered by another. He looked deathly pale. Nicholas put his finger to his lips in token of silence — a gesture which the other signified that he underetood.

Sir Ralph and his guests having taken their places at the table, an excellent and plentiful repast was speedily set before them, and if they did not do quite such ample justice to it as the hungry rustics at the lower board had done to the good things provided for them, the cook could not reasonably complain. No allusion whatever being made to the recent strange occurrence, the cheerfulness of the company was uninterrupted, but the noise in the lower part of the hall had in a great measure subsided, partly out of respect to the host, and partly in consequence of the alarm occasioned by the supposed supernatural visitation. Richard continued silent and preoccupied, and neither ate nor drank; but Nicholas appearing to think his courage would be best sustained by an extra allowance of clary and sack, applied himself frequently to the goblet with that view, and ere long his spirits improved so wonderfully, and his natural boldness was so much increased that he was ready to confront Abbot Paslew, or any other abbot of them all, wherever they might chance to cross him. In this enterprising frame of mind he drew Richard aside and questioned him as to what had taken place in his pursuit of the mysterious monk.

"You overtook him, Dick, of course?" he said, "and put it to him roundly why he came hither where neither ghosts nor Jesuit priests, whichever he may be, are wanted. What answered he, eh? Would I had been there to interrogate him!

He should have declared how he became possessed of that old moth-eaten, blood-stained, monkish gown, or I would have unfrocked him, even if he had proved to be a skeleton. But I interrupt you. You have not told me what occurred at the interview?"

"There was no interview," replied Richard, gravely.

"No interview!" echoed Nicholas. "S'blood, man! — but I must be careful, for Doctor Ormerod and Parson Dewhurst are within hearing, and may lecture me on the wantonness and profanity of swearing. By Saint Gregory de Northbury! — no, that 's an oath too, and what is worse, a Popish oath. By — I have several tremendous imprecations at my tongue's end, but they shall not out. It is a sinful propensity, and must be controlled. In a word, then, you let him escape, Dick?"

"If you were so anxious to stay him, I wonder you came not with me," replied Richard; "but you now hold very different language from what you used when I quitted the hall."

"Ah, true — right — Dick," replied Nicholas; "my sentiments have undergone a wonderful change since then. I now regret having stopped you. By my troth! if I meet that confounded monk again, he shall give a good account of himself, I promise him. But what said he to you, Dick? Make an end of your story."

"I have not begun it yet," replied Richard. "But pay attention, and you shall hear what occurred. When I rushed forth, the monk had already gained the entrance-hall. No one was within it at the time, all the serving-men being busied here with the feasting. I summoned him to stay, but he answered not, and, still grimly regarding me, glided towards the outer door, which (I know not by what chance) stood open, and passing through it, closed it upon me. This delayed me a moment; and when I got out, he had already descended the steps,

and was moving towards the garden. It was bright moonlight, so I could see him distinctly. And mark this, Nicholas, — the two great blood-hounds were running about at large in the court-yard, but they slunk off, as if alarmed at his appearance. The monk had now gained the garden, and was shaping his course swiftly towards the ruined Conventual Church. Determined to overtake him I quickened my pace; but he gained the old fane before me, and threaded the broken aisles with noiseless celerity. In the choir he paused and confronted me. When within a few yards of him, I paused, arrested by his fixed and terrible gaze. Nicholas, his look froze my blood. I would have spoken, but I could not. My tongue clove to the roof of my mouth for very fear. Before I could shake off this apprehension the figure raised its hand menacingly thrice, and passed into the Lacy Chapel. As soon as he was gone my courage returned, and I followed. The little chapel was brilliantly illuminated by the moon; but it was empty. I could only see the white monument of Sir Henry de Lacy glistening in the pale radiance."

"I must take a cup of wine after this horrific relation," said Nicholas, replenishing his goblet. "It has chilled my blood, as the monk's icy gaze froze yours. Body o' me! but this is strange indeed. Another oath. Lord help me! — I shall never get rid of the infernal — I mean, the evil habit. Will you not pledge me, Dick?"

The young man shook his head.

"You are wrong," pursued Nicholas, — "decidedly wrong. Wine gladdeneth the heart of man, and restoreth courage. A short while ago I was downcast as you, melancholy as an owl, and timorous as a kid, but now I am resolute as an eagle, stout of heart, and cheerful of spirit; and all owing to a cup of wine. Try the remedy, Dick, and get rid of your gloom. You look like a death's head at a festival. What if you have stum-

bled on an ill-omened grave! What if you have been banned by a witch! What if you have stood face to face with the devil — or a ghost! Heed them not! Drink, and set care at defiance. And not to gainsay my own counsel, I shall fill my cup again. For, in good sooth! this is rare clary, Dick; and talking of wine, you should taste some of the wonderful Rhenish found in the abbot's cellar by our ancestor, Richard Assheton — a century old, if it be a day, and yet cordial and corroborative as ever. Those monks were lusty tipplers, Dick. I sometimes wish I had been an abbot myself. I should have made a rare father confessor — especially to a pretty penitent. Here, Gregory, hie thee to the master cellarer, and bid him fill me a goblet of the old Rhenish — the wine from the abbot's cellar. Thou understandest — or, stay, better bring the flask. I have a profound respect for the venerable bottle, and would pay my devoirs to it. Hie away, good fellow."

"You will drink too much if you go on thus," remarked Richard.

"Not a drop," rejoined Nicholas. "I am blithe as a lark, and would keep so. That is why I drink. But to return to our ghosts. Since this place must be haunted I would it were visited by spirits of a livelier kind than old Paslew. There is Isole de Heton, for instance. The fair votaress would be the sort of ghost for me. I would not turn my back on her, but face her manfully. Look at her picture, Dick. Was ever countenance sweeter than hers — lips more tempting, or eyes more melting! Is she not adorable? Zounds!" he exclaimed, suddenly pausing, and staring at the portrait — "Would you believe it, Dick. The fair Isole winked at me — I 'll swear she did. I mean, I will venture to affirm, upon oath, if required, that she winked."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Richard. "The fumes of the wine have mounted to your brain, and disordered it."

"No such thing," cried Nicholas, regarding the picture as steadily as he could — "she 's leering at me now. By the Queen of Paphos! another wink. Nay, if you doubt me, watch her well yourself. A pleasant adventure this — ha — ha!"

"A truce to this drunken foolery," cried Richard, moving away.

"Drunken! s'death! recall that epithet, Dick," cried Nicholas, angrily. "I am no more drunk than yourself, you dog. I can walk as steadily, and see as plainly as you; and I will maintain it at the point of the sword, that the eyes of that picture have lovingly regarded me; nay, that they follow me now."

"A common delusion with a portrait," said Richard; "they appear to follow *me*."

"But they do not wink at you as they do at me," said Nicholas, "neither do the lips break into smiles, and display the pearly teeth beneath them, as occurs in my case. Grim old abbots frown on you, but fair, though frail, votaresses smile on me. I am the favoured mortal, Dick."

"Were it as you represent, Nicholas," replied Richard, gravely, "I should say, indeed, that some evil principle was at work to lure you through your passions, to perdition. But I know they are all fancies engendered by your heated brain, which, in your calmer moments you will discard, as I discard them now. If I have any weight with you, I counsel you to drink no more, or you will commit some mad foolery, of which you will be ashamed hereafter. The discreeter course would be, to retire altogether, and for this you have ample excuse, as you will have to arise betimes to-morrow to set out for Pendle Forest with Master Potts."

"Retire!" exclaimed Nicholas, bursting into a loud, contemptuous laugh. "I like thy counsel, lad. Yes, I will re-

tire when I have finished the old monastic Rhenish which Gregory is bringing me. I will retire when I have danced the Morisco with the May Queen — the Cushion Dance with Dame Tetlow — and the brawl with the lovely Isole de Heton. Another wink, Dick. By our Lady! she assents to my proposition. When I have done all this, and somewhat more, it will be time to think of retiring. But I have the night before me, Dick — not to be spent in drowsy unconsciousness as thou recommendest, but in active, pleasurable enjoyment. No man requires less sleep than I do. Ordinarily, I 'retire,' as thou termest it, at ten, and rise with the sun. In summer I am abroad soon after three, and mend that if thou canst, Dick. To-night I shall seek my couch about midnight, and yet I 'll warrant me I shall be the first stirring in the Abbey, and in any case I shall be in the saddle before thee."

"It may be," replied Richard, "but it was to preserve you from extravagance to-night that I volunteered advice, which from my knowledge of your character, I might as well have withheld. But let me caution you on another point. Dance with Dame Tetlow or any other dame you please — dance with the fair Isole de Heton, if you can prevail upon her to descend from her frame and give you her hand; but I object — most decidedly object — to your dancing with Alizon Device."

"Why so?" cried Nicholas — "why should I not dance with whom I please? And what right hast thou to forbid me Alizon? Troth, lad, art thou so ignorant of human nature as not to know that forbidden fruit is the sweetest. It hath ever been so since the fall. I am now only the more bent upon dancing with the prohibited damsel. But I would fain know the principle on which thou erectest thyself into her guardian. Is it because she fainted when thy sword was crossed with that hot-headed fool, Sir Thomas Metcalfe, that thou flatterest

thyself she is in love with thee. Be not too sure of it, Dick. Many a timid wench has swooned at the sight of a naked weapon, without being enamoured of the swordsman. The fainting proves nothing. But grant she loves thee — what then? An end must speedily come of it, so better finish at once, before she be entangled in a mesh from which she cannot be extricated without danger. For hark thee, Dick, whatever thou mayst think, I am not so far gone that I know not what I say, neither is my vision so much obscured that I see not some matters plainly enough, and I understand thee and Alizon well, and see through ye both. This matter must go no further. It has gone too far already. After to-night you must see her no more. I am serious in this — serious *inter pocula*, if such a thing can be. It is necessary to observe caution, for reasons that will at once occur to thee. Thou canst not wed this girl — then why trifle with her till her heart be broken."

"Broken it shall never be by me!" cried Richard.

"But I tell you it will be broken, if you do not desist at once," rejoined Nicholas. "I was but jesting when I said I would rob you of her in the Morisco, though it would be charity to both, and spare you many a pang hereafter were I to put my threat into execution. However, I have a soft heart where aught of love is concerned, and having pointed out the risk you will incur, I shall leave you to follow your own devices. But, for Alizon's sake, stop in time."

"You now speak soberly and sensibly enough, Nicholas," replied Richard; "and I thank you heartily for your counsel, and if I do not follow it by withdrawing at once from a pursuit which may appear to you hopeless, if not dangerous, you will, I hope, give me credit for being actuated by worthy motives. I will at once, and frankly admit, that I love Alizon, and loving her you may rest assured I would sacrifice my life a

thousand times rather than endanger her happiness. But there is a point in her history with which, if you were acquainted, it might alter your view of the case, but this is not the season for its disclosure, neither, I am bound to say, does the circumstance so materially alter the apparent posture of affairs as to remove all difficulty. On the contrary, it leaves an insurmountable obstacle behind it."

"Are you wise, then, in going on?" asked Nicholas.

"I know not," answered Richard, "but I feel as if I were the sport of fate. Uncertain whither to turn for the best, I leave the disposition of my course to chance. But alas!" he added, sadly, "all seems to point out that this meeting with Alizon will be my last."

"Well, cheer up, lad," said Nicholas. "These afflictions are hard to bear, it is true; but somehow they are got over. Just as if your horse should fling you in the midst of a hedge when you are making a flying leap, you get scratched and bruised, but you scramble out, and in a day or two are on your legs again. Love breaks no bones, that 's one comfort. When at your age I was desperately in love — not with Mistress Nicholas Assheton, Heaven help the fond soul! but with — never mind with whom — but it was not a very prudent match, and so, in my worldly wisdom, I was obliged to cry off. A sad business it was. I thought I should have died of it, and I made quite sure that the devoted girl would die first, in which case we were to occupy the same grave. But I was not driven to such a dire extremity, for before I had kept house a week, Jack Walker, the keeper of Downham, made his appearance in my room, and after telling me of the mischief done by a pair of otters in the Ribble, finding me in a very desponding state, ventured to inquire if I had heard the news. Expecting to hear of the death of the girl, I prepared myself for an outburst of grief, and resolved to give immediate

directions for a double funeral, when he informed me — what do you think, Dick? — that she was going to be married to himself. I recovered at once, and immediately went out to hunt the otters, and rare sport we had. — But here comes Gregory with the famous old Rhenish. Better take a cup, Dick. This is the best cure for the heartache, and for all other aches and grievances. Ah! glorious stuff — miraculous wine," he added, smacking his lips with extraordinary satisfaction, after a deep draught, "those worthy fathers were excellent judges. I have a great reverence for them. But where can Alizon be all this while? Supper is well nigh over, and the dancing and pastimes will commence anon, and yet she comes not."

"She is here," cried Richard.

And as he spoke Mistress Nutter and Alizon entered the hall.

Richard endeavoured to read in the young girl's countenance some intimation of what had passed between her and Mistress Nutter, but he only remarked that she was paler than before, and had traces of anxiety about her. Mistress Nutter also looked gloomy and thoughtful, and there was nothing in the manner or deportment of either to lead to the conclusion that a discovery of relationship between them had taken place. As Alizon moved on, her eyes met those of Richard — but the look was intercepted by Mistress Nutter, who instantly called off her daughter's attention to herself; and while the young man hesitated to join them, his sister came quickly up to him, and drew him away in another direction. Left to himself, Nicholas tossed off another cup of the miraculous Rhenish, which improved in flavour as he discussed it, and then placing a chair opposite the portrait of Isole de Heton, filled a bumper, and uttering the name of the fair votaress, drained it to her. This time he was quite certain he received

a significant glance in return, and no one being near to contradict him, he went on indulging the idea of an amorous understanding between himself and the picture, till he had finished the bottle, and obtained as many ogles as he swallowed draughts of wine, upon which he arose and staggered off in search of Dame Tetlow.

Meanwhile, Mistress Nutter having made her excuses to Lady Assheton for not attending the supper, walked down the hall with her daughter, until such time as the dancing and pastimes should commence. As will be readily supposed under the circumstances, this part of the entertainment was distasteful to both of them, but it could not be avoided without entering into explanations, which Mistress Nutter was unwilling to make, and she, therefore, counselled her daughter to act in all respects as if she were still Alizon Device, and in no way connected with her.

"I shall take an early opportunity of announcing my intention to adopt you," she said, "and then you can act differently. Meantime, keep near me as much as you can. Say little to Dorothy or Richard Assheton, and prepare to retire early, for this noisy and riotous assemblage is not much to my taste, and I care not how soon I quit it."

Alizon assented to what was said, and stole a timid glance towards Richard and Dorothy; but the latter, who alone perceived it, instantly averted her head, in such way as to make it evident she wished to shun her regards. Slight as it was, this circumstance occasioned Alizon much pain, for she could not conceive how she had offended her new-made friend, and it was some relief to encounter a party of acquaintances who had risen from the lower table at her approach, though they did not presume to address her, while she was with Mistress Nutter, but waited respectfully at a little distance. Alizon, however, flew towards them.

"Ah, Susan! — ah, Nancy!" she cried, taking the hand of each — "how glad I am to see you here; and you too, Lawrence Blackrod — and you, Phil Rawson — and you, also, good Master Harrop. How happy you all look!"

"An wi' good reason, sweet Alizon," replied Blackrod. "Boh we began to be afeerd we'd lost ye, an that wad ha' bin a sore mishap — to lose our May Queen — an th' prottiest May Queen os ever dawnced i' this ha', or i' onny other ha' i' Lankyshiar."

"We ha drunk your health, sweet Alizon," added Phil — "an wishin' ye may be os happy os ye desarve, wi' the mon o' your heart, if onny sich lucky chap there be."

"Thank you — thank you both," replied Alizon, blushing; "and in return I cannot wish you better fortune, Philip, than to be united to the good girl near you, for I know her kindly disposition so well, that I am sure she will make you happy."

"Ey'm satisfied on't myself," replied Rawson; "an ey hope ere long she 'll be missus o' a little cot i' Bowland Forest, an that yo'll pay us a visit, Alizon, an see an judge fo' yourself how happy we be. Nance win make a rare forester's wife."

"Not a bit better than my Sukey," cried Lawrence Blackrod. "Ye shanna get th' start o' me, Phil, fo' by th' mess! the very same day os sees yo wedded to Nancy Holt shan find me united to Sukey Worsley. An so Alizon win ha' two cottages i' Bowland Forest to visit i'stead o' one."

"And well pleased I shall be to visit them both," she rejoined.

At this moment Mistress Nutter came up.

"My good friends," she said, "as you appear to take so much interest in Alizon, you may be glad to learn that it is my intention to adopt her as a daughter, having no child of my own, and though her position henceforth will be very different

from what it has been, I am sure she will never forget her old friends."

"Never, indeed, never!" cried Alizon, earnestly.

"This is good news, indeed," cried Sampson Harrop, joyfully, while the others joined in his exclamation. "We all rejoice in Alizon's good fortune, and think she richly deserves it. For my own part, I was always sure she would have rare luck, but I did not expect such luck as this."

"What 's to become o' me?" cried Jennet, coming from behind a chair, where she had hitherto concealed herself.

"I will always take care of you," replied Alizon, stooping, and kissing her.

"Do not promise more than you may be able to perform, Alizon," observed Mistress Nutter, coldly, and regarding the little girl with a look of disgust; "an ill-favour'd little creature, with the Demdike eyes."

"And as ill-tempered as she is ill-favoured," rejoined Sampson Harrop, "and though she cannot help being ugly, she might help being malicious."

Jennet gave him a bitter look.

"You do her injustice, Master Harrop," said Alizon. "Poor little Jennet is quick-tempered, but not malevolent."

"Ey con hate weel if ey conna love," replied Jennet, "an con recollect injuries if ey forget kindnesses. — Boh dunna trouble yourself about me, sister. Ey dunna envy ye your luck. Ey dunna want to be adopted by a grand dame. Ey'm content os ey am. Boh are na ye gettin' on raythertoo fast, lass? Mother's consent has to be axed, ey suppose, efore ye leave her."

"There is little fear of her refusal," observed Mistress Nutter.

"Ey dunna knoa that," rejoined Jennet. "If she were to refuse, it wadna surprise me."

"Nothing spiteful she could do would surprise me," remarked Harrop. "But how are you likely to know what your mother will think and do, you forward little hussey?"

"Ey judge fro' circumstances," replied the little girl, "Mother has often said she conna weel spare Alizon. An mayhap Mistress Nutter may knoa, that she con be very obstinate when she tays a whim into her head."

"I *do* know it," replied Mistress Nutter; "and, from my experience of her temper in former days, I should be loath to have you near me, who seem to inherit her obstinacy."

"Wi' sich misgivings ey wonder ye wish to tak Alizon, Madam," said Jennet, "fo' she's os much o' her mother about her os me, onny she dunna choose to show it."

"Peace, thou mischievous urchin," cried Mistress Nutter, losing all patience.

"Shall I take her away?" said Harrop — seizing her hand.

"Ay, do," said Mistress Nutter.

"No, no, let her stay," cried Alizon, quickly, "I shall be miserable if she goes."

"Oh, ey'm quite ready to go," said Jennet, "for ey care little fo sich seets os this — boh efore ey leave ey wad fain say a few words to Mester Potts whom ey see yonder."

"What can you want with him, Jennet?" cried Alizon, in surprise.

"Onny to tell him what brother Jem is gone to Pendle fo' to-neet," replied the little girl, with a significant and malicious look at Mistress Nutter.

"Ha!" muttered the lady. "There is more malice in this little wasp than I thought. But I must rob it of its sting."

And while thus communing with herself, she fixed a searching look on Jennet, and then raising her hand quickly, waved it in her face.

"Oh!" cried the little girl, falling suddenly backwards.

"What 's the matter?" demanded Alizon, flying to her.

"Ey dunna reetly knoa," replied Jennet.

"She 's seized with a sudden faintness," said Harrop. "Better she should go home then at once. I 'll find somebody to take her."

"Neaw, neaw, ey'n sit down here," said Jennet, "ey shan be better soon."

"Come along, Alizon," said Mistress Nutter, apparently unconcerned at the circumstance.

Having confided the little girl, who was now recovered from the shock, to the care of Nancy Holt, Alizon followed her mother.

At this moment, Sir Ralph, who had quitted the supper-table, clapped his hands loudly, thus giving the signal to the minstrels, who having repaired to the gallery now struck up a merry tune, and instantly the whole hall was in motion. Snatching up his wand Sampson Harrop hurried after Alizon, beseeching her to return with him, and join a procession about to be formed by the revellers, and, of course, as May Queen, and the most important personage in it, she could not refuse. Very short space sufficed the morris-dancers to find their partners; Robin Hood and the foresters got into their places; the hobby-horse curvetted and capered; Friar Tuck resumed his drolleries; and even Jack Roby was so far recovered as to be able to get on his legs, though he could not walk very steadily. Marshalled by the gentleman-usher, and headed by Robin Hood and the May Queen, the procession marched round the hall, the minstrels playing merrily the while, and then drew up before the upper table, where a brief oration was pronounced by Sir Ralph. A shout that made the rafters ring again followed the address, after which a couranto was called for by the host, who taking Mistress Nicholas Assheton

by the hand, led her into the body of the hall, whither he was speedily followed by the other guests who had found partners in like manner.

Before relating how the ball was opened a word must be bestowed upon Mistress Nicholas Assheton, whom I have neglected nearly as much as she was neglected by her unworthy spouse, and I therefore hasten to repair the injustice by declaring that she was a very amiable and very charming woman, and danced delightfully. And recollect, ladies, these were dancing days — I mean days when knowledge of figures as well as skill was required, more than twenty forgotten dances being in vogue, the very names of which may surprise you as I recapitulate them. There was the passamezzo, a great favourite with Queen Elizabeth, who used to foot it merrily, when, as you are told by Gray —

> "The great Lord-keeper led the brawls,
> And seals and maces danced before him!"

the grave pavane, likewise a favourite with the Virgin Queen, and which I should like to see supersede the eternal polka at Almack's and elsewhere, and in which —

> "Five was the number of the music's feet
> Which still the dance did with five paces meet;"

the couranto, with its, "current traverses," "sliding passages," and solemn tune, wherein, according to Sir John Davies, —

> —"that dancer greatest praise hath won
> Who with best order can all order shun;"

the lavolta, also delineated by the same knowing hand, —

> "Where arm in arm two dancers are entwined,
> And whirl themselves with strict embracements bound,
> And still their feet an anapest do sound."

Is not this very much like a waltz? Yes, ladies, you have been dancing the lavolta of the sixteenth and seventeenth

centuries without being aware of it. But there was another waltz still older, called the sauteuse, which I suspect answered to your favourite polka. Then there were brawls, galliards, paspys, sarabands, country-dances of various figures, cushion dances (another dance I long to see revived), kissing dances, and rounds, any of which are better than the objectionable polka. Thus you will see that there was infinite variety at least at the period under consideration, and that you have rather retrograded than advanced in the saltatory art. But to return to the ball.

Mistress Nicholas Assheton, I have said, excelled in the graceful accomplishment of dancing, and that was probably the reason why she had been selected for the couranto by Sir Ralph, who knew the value of a good partner. By many persons she was accounted the handsomest woman in the room, and in dignity of carriage, she was certainly unrivalled. This was precisely what Sir Ralph required, and having executed a few "current traverses and sliding passages" with her, with a gravity and stateliness worthy of Sir Christopher Hatton himself, when graced by the hand of his sovereign mistress, he conducted her amid the hushed admiration of the beholders, to a seat. Still the dance continued with unabated spirit; all those engaged in it running up and down, or "turning and winding with unlooked-for change." Alizon's hand had been claimed by Richard Assheton, and next to the stately host and his dignified partner, they came in for the largest share of admiration and attention; and if the untutored girl fell short of the accomplished dame in precision and skill, she made up for the want of them, in natural grace and freedom of movement, for the display of which the couranto with its frequent and impromptu changes afforded ample opportunity. Even Sir Ralph was struck with her extreme gracefulness, and pointed her out to Mistress Nicholas, who, unenvying and

amiable, joined heartily in his praises. Overhearing what was said, Mistress Nutter thought it a fitting opportunity to announce her intention of adopting the young girl; and though Sir Ralph seemed a good deal surprised at the suddenness of the declaration, he raised no objection to the plan; but, on the contrary, applauded it. But another person, by no means disposed to regard it in an equally favourable light, became acquainted with the intelligence at the same time. This was Master Potts, who instantly set his wits at work to discover its import. Ever on the alert, his little eyes, sharp as needles, had detected Jennet amongst the rustic company, and he now made his way towards her, resolved, by dint of cross-questioning and otherwise, to extract all the information he possibly could from her.

The dance over, Richard and his partner wandered towards a more retired part of the hall.

"Why does your sister shun me?" inquired Alizon, with a look of great distress. "What can I have done to offend her? Whenever I regard her she averts her head, and as I approached her just now, she moved away, making it evident she designed to avoid me. If I could think myself in any way different from what I was this morning, when she treated me with such unbounded confidence and kindness, or accuse myself of any offence towards her, even in thought, I could understand it; but as it is, her present coldness appears inexplicable and unreasonable, and gives me great pain. I would not forfeit her regard for worlds, and therefore beseech you to tell me what I have done amiss that I may endeavour to repair it."

"You have done nothing—nothing, whatever, sweet girl," replied Richard. "It is only caprice on Dorothy's part, and except that it distresses you, her conduct, which you justly

call 'unreasonable,' does not deserve a moment's serious consideration."

"Oh, no, you cannot deceive me thus," cried Alizon. "She is too kind — too well-judging, to be capricious. Something must have occurred to make her change her opinion of me, though what it is I cannot conjecture. I have gained much to-day — more than I had any right to expect — but if I have forfeited the good opinion of your sister, the loss of her friendship will counterbalance all the rest."

"But you have not lost it, Alizon," replied Richard, earnestly. "Dorothy has got some strange notions into her head, which only require to be combated. She does not like Mistress Nutter, and is piqued and displeased by the extraordinary interest which that lady displays towards you. That is all."

"But why should she not like Mistress Nutter?" inquired Alizon.

"Nay, there is no accounting for fancies," returned Richard, with a faint smile. "I do not attempt to defend her, but simply offer the only excuse in my power for her conduct."

"I am concerned to hear it," said Alizon, sadly, "because henceforth I shall be so intimately connected with Mistress Nutter, that this estrangement, which I hoped arose only from some trivial cause, and merely required a little explanation to be set aside, may become widened and lasting. Owing every thing to Mistress Nutter, I must espouse her cause, and if your sister likes her not, she likes me not in consequence, and therefore we must continue divided. But surely her dislike is of very recent date, and cannot have any strong hold upon her; for, when she and Mistress Nutter met this morning, a very different feeling seemed to animate her."

"So, indeed, it did," replied Richard, visibly embar-

rassed and distressed. "And since you have made me acquainted with the new tie and interests you have formed, I can only regret alluding to the circumstance."

"That you may not misunderstand me," said Alizon, "I will explain the extent of my obligations to Mistress Nutter, and then you will perceive how much I am bounden to her. Childless herself, greatly interested in me, and feeling for my unfortunate situation, with infinite goodness of heart she has declared her intention of removing me from all chance of baneful influence, from the family with whom I have been heretofore connected, by adopting me as her daughter."

"I should indeed rejoice at this," said Richard, "were it not that —"

And he stopped, gazing anxiously at her.

"Were not what?" cried Alizon, alarmed by his looks. "What do you mean?"

"Do not press me further," he rejoined, "I cannot answer you. Indeed I have said too much already."

"You have said too much or too little," cried Alizon. "Speak, I implore you. What mean these dark hints which you throw out, and which like shadows elude all attempts to grasp them! Do not keep me in this state of suspense and agitation. Your looks speak more than your words. Oh, give your thoughts utterance!"

"I cannot," replied Richard. "I do not believe what I have heard, and, therefore, will not repeat it. It would only increase the mischief. But, oh! tell me this! Was it, indeed, to remove you from the baneful influence of Elizabeth Device that Mistress Nutter adopted you?"

"Other motives may have swayed her, and I have said they did so," replied Alizon; "but that wish, no doubt, had great weight with her. Nay, notwithstanding her abhorrence of the family, she has kindly consented to use her best endeavours

to preserve little Jennet from further ill, as well as to reclaim poor misguided Elizabeth herself."

"Oh! what a weight you have taken from my heart," cried Richard, joyfully. "I will tell Dorothy what you say, and it will at once remove all her doubts and suspicions. She will now be the same to you as ever, and to Mistress Nutter."

"I will not ask you what those doubts and suspicions were, since you so confidently promise me this, which is all I desire," replied Alizon, smiling; "but any unfavourable opinions entertained of Mistress Nutter are wholly undeserved. Poor lady! she has endured many severe trials and sufferings, and whenever you learn the whole of her history, she will, I am sure, have your sincere sympathy."

"You have certainly produced a complete revolution in my feelings towards her," said Richard, "and I shall not be easy till I have made a like convert of Dorothy."

At this moment a loud clapping of hands was heard, and Nicholas was seen marching towards the centre of the hall, preceded by the minstrels who had descended for the purpose from the gallery, and bearing in his arms a large red velvet cushion. As soon as the dancers had formed a wide circle round him, a very lively tune called "Joan Sanderson," from which the dance, about to be executed, sometimes received its name, was struck up, and the squire, after a few preliminary flourishes, set down the cushion, and gave chase to Dame Tetlow, who, threading her way rapidly through the ring, contrived to elude him. This chase, accompanied by music, excited shouts of laughter on all hands, and no one knew which most to admire, the eagerness of the squire, or the dexterity of the lissom dame in avoiding him.

Exhausted, at length, and baffled in his quest, Nicholas came to a halt before Tom the Piper, and, taking up the

cushion, thus preferred his complaint: — "This dance it can no further go — no further go."

Whereupon the piper chanted in reply, — "I pray you, good Sir, why say you so, — why say you so?"

Amidst general laughter, the squire tenderly and touchingly responded — "Because Dame Tetlow will not come to, — will not come to."

Whereupon Tom the Piper, waxing furious, blew a shrill whistle, accompanied by an encouraging rattle of the tambourine, and enforcing the mandate by two or three energetic stamps on the floor, delivered himself in this fashion: — "She *must* come to, and she SHALL come to. And she must come, whether she will or no."

Upon this two of the prettiest female morris-dancers, taking each a hand of the blushing and over-heated Dame Tetlow, for she had found the chase rather warm work, led her forward; while the squire advancing, very gallantly placed the cushion upon the ground before her, and as she knelt down upon it, bestowed a smacking kiss upon her lips. This ceremony being performed amidst much tittering and flustering, accompanied by many knowing looks and some expressed wishes among the swains, who hoped that their turn might come next, Dame Tetlow arose, and the squire seizing her hand, they began to whisk round in a sort of jig, singing merrily as they danced —

"Prinkum prankum is a fine dance,
And we shall go dance it once again!
Once again,
And we shall go dance it once again!"

And they made good the words too, for on coming to a stop, Dame Tetlow snatched up the cushion, and ran in search of the squire, who retreating among the surrounding damsels, made sad havoc among them, scarcely leaving a pretty pair of

lips unvisited. Oh Nicholas! Nicholas! I am thoroughly ashamed of you, and regret becoming your historian. You get me into an infinitude of scrapes. But there is a rod in pickle for you, Sir, which shall be used with good effect presently. Tired of such an unprofitable quest, Dame Tetlow came to a sudden halt, addressed the piper as Nicholas had addressed him, and receiving a like answer, summoned the delinquent to come forward, but as he knelt down on the cushion, instead of receiving the anticipated salute, he got a sound box on the ears, the dame, actuated probably by some feeling of jealousy, taking advantage of the favourable opportunity afforded her of avenging herself. No one could refrain from laughing at this unexpected turn in affairs, and Nicholas, to do him justice, took it in excellent part, and laughed louder than the rest. Springing to his feet, he snatched the kiss denied him by the spirited dame, and led her to obtain some refreshment at the lower table, of which they both stood in need, while the cushion being appropriated by other couples, other boxes on the ear and kisses were interchanged, leading to an infinitude of merriment.

Long before this Master Potts had found his way to Jennet, and as he drew near, affecting to notice her for the first time, he made some remarks upon her not looking very well.

"'Deed, an ey'm nah verry weel," replied the little girl, "boh ey knoa who ey han to thonk fo' my ailment."

"Your sister, most probably," suggested the attorney. "It must be very vexatious to see her so much noticed, and be yourself so much neglected — very vexatious, indeed — I quite feel for you."

"Ey dunna want your feelin'," replied Jennet, nettled by the remark; "boh it wasna my sister os made me ill."

"Who was it then, my little dear," said Potts.

"Dunna 'dear' me," retorted Jennet; "yo're too ceevil

by half, os the lamb said to the wolf. Boh sin ye mun knoa, it wur Mistress Nutter."

"Aha! very good — I mean — very bad," cried Potts. "What did Mistress Nutter do to you, my little dear? Don't be afraid of telling me. If I can do any thing for you I shall be very happy. Speak out — and don't be afraid."

"Nay fo' shure, ey'm nah afeerd," returned Jennet. "Boh whot mays ye so inqueesitive? Ye want to get summat out'n me, ey con see that plain enough, an os ye stand there glenting at me wi' your sly little een, ye look loike an owd fox ready to snap up a chicken o' th' furst opportunity."

"Your comparison is not very flattering, Jennet," replied Potts; "but I pass it by for the sake of its cleverness. You are a sharp child, Jennet — a very sharp child. I remarked that from the first moment I saw you. But in regard to Mistress Nutter, she seems a very nice lady — and must be a very kind lady, since she has made up her mind to adopt your sister. Not that I am surprised at her determination, for really Alizon is so superior — so unlike —"

"Me, ye wad say," interrupted Jennet. "Dunna be efeerd to speak out, Sir."

"No, no," replied Potts, "on the contrary, there 's a very great likeness between you. I saw you were sisters at once. I don't know which is the cleverest or prettiest — but perhaps you are the sharpest. Yes, you are the sharpest, undoubtedly, Jennet. If I wished to adopt any one, which, unfortunately, I 'm not in a condition to do, having only bachelors' chambers in Chancery Lane, it should be you. But I can put you in a way of making your fortune, Jennet, and that 's the next best thing to adopting you. Indeed, it 's much better in my case."

"May my fortune!" cried the little girl, pricking up her ears, "ey should loike to knoa how ye wad contrive that."

"I 'll show you how, directly, Jennet," returned Potts. "Pay particular attention to what I say, and think it over carefully, when you are by yourself. You are quite aware that there is a great talk about witches in these parts; and, I may speak it without offence to you, your own family come under the charge. There is your grandmother Demdike, for instance, a notorious witch — your mother, Dame Device, suspected — your brother James suspected."

"Weel, Sir," cried Jennet, eyeing him, sharply, "What does all this suspicion tend to?"

"You shall hear, my little dear," returned Potts. "It would not surprise me, if every one of your family, including yourself, should be arrested, shut up in Lancaster Castle, and burnt for witches!"

"Alack a day! an this ye ca' makin my fortin," cried Jennet, derisively. "Much obleeged to ye, Sir, boh ey'd leefer be without the luck."

"Listen to me," pursued Potts, chuckling, "and I will point out to you a way of escaping the general fate of your family — not merely of escaping it — but of acquiring a large reward. And that is by giving evidence against them — by telling all you know — you understand — eh!"

"Yeigh, ey think ey *do* onderstond," replied Jennet, sullenly. "An so this is your grand scheme, eh, Sir?"

"This is my scheme, Jennet," said Potts, "and a notable scheme it is, my little lass. Think it over. You 're an admissible and indeed a desirable witness; for our sagacious sovereign has expressly observed that 'bairns,' (I believe you call children 'bairns,' in Lancashire, Jennet; your uncouth dialect very much resembles the Scottish language, in which our learned monarch writes as well as speaks) — 'bairns,' says he, 'or wives, or never so defamed persons may of our law

serve for sufficient witnesses and proofs; for who but witches can be proofs, and so witnesses of the doings of witches.'"

"Boh, ey am neaw witch, ey tell ye, mon," cried Jennet, angrily.

"But you 're a witch's bairn, my little lassy," replied Potts, "and that 's just as bad, and you 'll grow up to be a witch in due time — that is if your career be not cut short. I 'm sure you must have witnessed some strange things when you visited your grandmother at Malkin Tower — that, if I mistake not, is the name of her abode? — and a fearful and witch-like name it is, — you must have heard frequent mutterings and curses, spells, charms, and diabolical incantations — beheld strange and monstrous visions — listened to threats uttered against people who have afterwards perished unaccountably."

"Ey've heerd an seen nowt o't sort," replied Jennet; "boh ey' han heerd my mother threaten yo."

"Ah, indeed," cried Potts, forcing a laugh, but looking rather blank afterwards; "and how did she threaten me, Jennet, eh? — But no matter. Let that pass for the moment. As I was saying, you must have seen mysterious proceedings both at Malkin Tower and your own house. A black gentleman with a club-foot must visit you occasionally, and your mother must now and then — say once a week — take a fancy to riding on a broomstick. Are you quite sure you have never ridden on one yourself, Jennet, and got whisked up the chimney without being aware of it? It 's the common witch conveyance, and said to be very expeditious and agreeable — but I can't vouch for it myself — ha! ha! Possibly — though you are rather young — but possibly, I say, you may have attended a witch's Sabbath, and seen a huge He-Goat, with four horns on his head, and a large tail, seated in the midst of a large circle of devoted admirers. If you have seen this, and

can recollect the names and faces of the assembly, it would be highly important."

"When ey see it, ey shanna forget it," replied Jennet. "Boh ey am nah quite so familiar wi Owd Scrat os yo seem to suppose."

"Has it ever occurred to you that Alizon might be addicted to these practices?" pursued Potts, "and that she obtained her extraordinary and otherwise unaccountable beauty by some magical process — some charm — some diabolical unguent prepared, as the Lord Keeper of the Privy Seals, the singularly learned Lord Bacon, declares, from fat of unbaptised babes, compounded with henbane, hemlock, mandrake, moonshade, and other terrible ingredients. She could not be so beautiful without some such aid."

"That shows how little yo knoaw about it," replied Jennet. "Alizon is os good os she 's protty, and dunna yo think to wheedle me into sayin' out agen her, fo' yo winna do it. Ey'd dee rayther than harm a hure o' her heaod."

"Very praiseworthy, indeed, my little dear," replied Potts, ironically. "I honour you for your sisterly affection, but notwithstanding all this I cannot help thinking she has bewitched Mistress Nutter."

"Licker, Mistress Nutter has bewitched her," replied Jennet.

"Then you think Mistress Nutter is a witch, eh?" cried Potts, eagerly.

"Ey'st neaw tell ye what ey think, mon," rejoined Jennet, doggedly.

"But hear me," cried Potts, "I have my own suspicions, also, nay, more than suspicions."

"If ye're shure, yo dunna want me," said Jennet.

"But I want a witness," pursued Potts, "and if you 'll serve as one —"

"Whot 'll ye gi' me?" said Jennet.

"Whatever you like," rejoined Potts. "Only name the sum. So you can prove the practice of witchcraft against Mistress Nutter — eh?"

Jennet nodded. "Wad ye loike to knoa why brother Jem is gone to Pendle to neet?" she said.

"Very much indeed," replied Potts, drawing still nearer to her. "Very much indeed."

The little girl was about to speak, but on a sudden a sharp convulsion agitated her frame; her utterance totally failed her; and she fell back in the seat insensible.

Very much startled, Potts flew in search of some restorative, and on doing so, he perceived Mistress Nutter moving away from this part of the hall.

"She has done it," he cried. "A piece of witchcraft before my very eyes. Has she killed the child? No; she breathes, and her pulse beats, though faintly. She is only in a swoon, but a deep and deathlike one. It would be useless to attempt to revive her; she must come to in her own way, or at the pleasure of the wicked woman who has thrown her into this condition. I have now an assured witness in this girl. But I must keep watch upon Mistress Nutter's further movements."

And he walked cautiously after her.

As Richard had anticipated, his explanation was perfectly satisfactory to Dorothy, and the young lady, who had suffered greatly from the restraint she had imposed upon herself, flew to Alizon, and poured forth excuses, which were as readily accepted as they were freely made. They were instantly as great friends as before, and their brief estrangement only seemed to make them dearer to each other. Dorothy could not forgive herself, and Alizon assured her there was nothing to be forgiven, and so they took hands upon it, and promised

to forget all that had passed. Richard stood by, delighted with the change, and wrapped in the contemplation of the object of his love, who, thus engaged, seemed to him more beautiful than he had ever beheld her.

Towards the close of the evening, while all three were still together, Nicholas came up and took Richard aside. The squire looked flushed; and there was an undefined expression of alarm in his countenance.

"What is the matter?" inquired Richard, dreading to hear of some new calamity.

"Have you not noticed it, Dick?" said Nicholas, in a hollow tone. "The portrait is gone."

"What portrait?" exclaimed Richard, forgetting the previous circumstances.

"The portrait of Isole de Heton," returned Nicholas, becoming more sepulchral in his accents as he proceeded, "it has vanished from the wall. See and believe."

"Who has taken it down?" cried Richard, remarking that the picture had certainly disappeared.

"No mortal hand," replied Nicholas. "It has come down of itself. I knew what would happen, Dick. I told you the fair votaress gave me the *clin d'œil* — the wink. You would not believe me then — and now you see your mistake."

"I see nothing but the bare wall," said Richard.

"But you will see something anon, Dick," rejoined Nicholas, with a hollow laugh, and in a dismally deep tone. "You will see Isole herself. I was fool-hardy enough to invite her to dance the brawl with me. She smiled her assent, and winked at me thus — very significantly I protest to you — and she will be as good as her word."

"Absurd!" exclaimed Richard.

"Absurd, sayest thou — thou art an infidel and believest nothing, Dick," cried Nicholas. "Dost thou not see that the

picture is gone? She will be here presently. Ha! the brawl is called for — the very dance I invited her to. She must be in the room now. I will go in search of her. Look out, Dick. Thou wilt behold a sight presently shall make thine hair stand on end."

And he moved away with a rapid but uncertain step.

"The potent wine has confused his brain," said Richard. "I must see that no mischance befalls him."

And waving his hand to his sister, he followed the squire, who moved on, staring inquisitively into the countenance of every pretty damsel he encountered.

Time had flown fleetly with Dorothy and Alizon, who, occupied with each other, had taken little note of its progress, and were surprised to find how quickly the hours had gone by. Meanwhile, several dances had been performed; a Morisco, in which all the May Day revellers took part, with the exception of the queen herself, who, notwithstanding the united entreaties of Robin Hood and her gentleman-usher, could not be prevailed upon to join it: a trenchmore, a sort of long country-dance, extending from top to bottom of the hall, and in which the whole of the rustics stood up: a galliard, confined to the more important guests, and in which both Alizon and Dorothy were included, the former dancing of course with Richard, and the latter with one of her cousins, young Joseph Robinson: and a jig, quite promiscuous and unexclusive, and not the less merry on that account. In this way, what with the dances, which were of some duration, the trenchmore alone occupying more than an hour, and the necessary breathing time between them, it was on the stroke of ten without any body being aware of it. Now this, though a very early hour for a modern party, being about the time when the first guest would arrive, was a very late one even in fashionable assemblages at the period in question, and the guests began to

think of retiring, when the brawl intended to wind up the entertainment was called. The highest animation still prevailed throughout the company, for the generous host had taken care that the intervals between the dances should be well filled up with refreshments, and large bowls of spiced wines, with burnt oranges and crabs floating in them, were placed on the side-table and liberally dispensed to all applicants. Thus all seem destined to be brought to a happy conclusion.

Throughout the evening Alizon had been closely watched by Mistress Nutter, who remarked with feelings akin to jealousy and distrust, the marked predilection exhibited by her for Richard and Dorothy Assheton, as well as her inattention to her own expressed injunctions in remaining constantly near them. Though secretly displeased by this, she put a calm face upon it, and neither remonstrated by word or look. Thus Alizon feeling encouraged in the course she had adopted, and prompted by her inclinations, soon forgot the interdiction she had received. Mistress Nutter even went so far in her duplicity as to promise Dorothy that Alizon should pay her an early visit at Middleton — though inwardly resolving no such visit should ever take place. However, she now received the proposal very graciously, and made Alizon quite happy in acceding to it.

"I would fain have her go back with me to Middleton when I return," said Dorothy, "but I fear you would not like to part with your newly-adopted daughter so soon; neither would it be quite fair to rob you of her. But I shall hold you to your promise of an early visit."

Mistress Nutter replied by a bland smile, and then observed to Alizon, that it was time for them to retire, and that she had stayed on her account far later than she intended — a mark of consideration duly appreciated by Alizon. Fare-

wells for the night were then exchanged between the two girls, and Alizon looked round to bid adieu to Richard, but unfortunately at this very juncture he was engaged in pursuit of Nicholas. Before quitting the hall she made inquiries after Jennet, and receiving for answer that she was still in the hall, but had fallen asleep in a chair at one corner of the side-table, and could not be wakened, she instantly flew thither, and tried to rouse her, but in vain, when Mrs. Nutter coming up the next moment merely touched her brow and the little girl opened her eyes, and gazed about her with a bewildered look.

"She is unused to these late hours, poor child," said Alizon. "Some one must be found to take her home."

"You need not go far in search of a convoy," said Potts, who had been hovering about, and now stepped up; "I am going to the Dragon myself, and shall be happy to take charge of her."

"You are over-officious, Sir," rejoined Mistress Nutter, coldly; "when we need your assistance we will ask it. My own servant, Simon Blackadder, will see her safely home."

And at a sign from her, a tall fellow, with a dark, scowling countenance, came from among the other serving-men, and, receiving his instructions from his mistress, seized Jennet's hand, and strode off with her. During all this time, Mistress Nutter kept her eyes steadily fixed on the little girl, who spoke not a word, nor replied even by a gesture to Alizon's affectionate good night, retaining her dazed look to the moment of quitting the hall.

"I newer saw her thus before," said Alizon. "What can be the matter with her?"

"I think I could tell you," rejoined Potts, glancing maliciously and significantly at Mistress Nutter.

The lady darted an ireful and piercing look at him, which

seemed to produce much the same consequences as those experienced by Jennet, for his visage instantly elongated, and he sank back in a chair.

"Oh, dear!" he cried, putting his hand to his head; "I'm struck all of a heap. I feel a sudden qualm — a giddiness — a sort of don't-know-howishness. Ho, there! some aqua-vitæ — or imperial water — or cinnamon water, or whatever reviving cordial may be at hand. I feel very ill — very ill, indeed — oh dear!"

While his requirements were attended to, Mistress Nutter moved away with her daughter, but they had not proceeded far, when they encountered Richard, who, having fortunately descried them, came up to say good night.

The brawl, meanwhile, had commenced, and the dancers were whirling round giddily in every direction, somewhat like the couples in a grand polka, danced after a very boisterous, romping, and extravagant fashion.

"Who is Nicholas dancing with," asked Mistress Nutter, suddenly.

"Is he dancing with any one?" rejoined Richard, looking amidst the crowd.

"Do you not see her?" said Mistress Nutter; "a very beautiful woman with flashing eyes; they move so quickly, that I can scarce discern her features; but she is habited like a nun."

"Like a nun," cried Richard, his blood growing chill in his veins. "'T is she indeed, then! Where is he?"

"Yonder, yonder, whirling madly round," replied Mistress Nutter.

"I see him now," said Richard, "but he is alone. He has lost his wits to dance in that strange manner by himself. How wild too is his gaze."

"I tell you he is dancing with a very beautiful woman in

the habit of a nun," said Mistress Nutter. "Strange I should never have remarked her before. No one in the room is to be compared with her in loveliness — not even Alizon. Her eyes seem to flash fire, and she bounds like the wild roe."

"Does she resemble the portrait of Isole de Heton?" asked Richard, shuddering.

"She does — she does," replied Mistress Nutter. "See! she whirls past us now."

"I can see no one but Nicholas," cried Richard.

"Nor I," added Alizon, who shared in the young man's alarm.

"Are you sure you behold that figure?" said Richard, drawing Mistress Nutter aside, and breathing the words in her ear. "If so it is a phantom — or he is in the power of the fiend. He was rash enough to invite that wicked votaress, Isole de Heton, condemned, it is said, to penal fires for her earthly enormities, to dance with him, and she has come."

"Ha!" exclaimed Mistress Nutter.

"She will whirl him round till he expires," cried Richard; "I must free him at all hazards."

"Stay," said Mistress Nutter; "it is I who have been deceived. Now I look again, I see that Nicholas is alone."

"But the nun's dress — the wondrous beauty — the flashing eyes!" cried Richard. "You described Isole exactly."

"It was mere fancy," said Mistress Nutter. "I had just been looking at her portrait, and it dwelt on my mind, and created the image."

"The portrait is gone," cried Richard, pointing to the empty wall.

Mistress Nutter looked confounded.

And without a word more, she took Alizon, who was full of alarm and astonishment, by the arm, and hurried her out of the hall.

As they disappeared, the young man flew towards Nicholas, whose extraordinary proceedings had excited general amazement. The other dancers had moved out of the way, so that free space was left for his mad gyrations. Greatly scandalised by the exhibition, which he looked upon as the effect of intoxication, Sir Ralph called loudly to him to stop, but he paid no attention to the summons, but whirled on with momently-increasing velocity, oversetting old Adam Whitworth, Gregory, and Dickon, who severally ventured to place themselves in his path, to enforce their master's injunctions, until at last just as Richard reached him, he uttered a loud cry, and fell to the ground insensible. By Sir Ralph's command he was instantly lifted up and transported to his own chamber.

This unexpected and extraordinary incident put an end to the ball, and the whole of the guests, after taking a respectful and grateful leave of the host, departed — not in "most admired" disorder, but full of wonder. By most persons the squire's "fantastical vagaries," as they were termed, were traced to the vast quantity of wine he had drunk, but a few others shook their heads, and said he was evidently bewitched, and that Mother Chattox and Nance Redferne were at the bottom of it. As to the portrait of Isole de Heton, it was found under the table, and it was said, that Nicholas himself had pulled it down; but this he obstinately denied, when afterwards taken to task for his indecorous behaviour; and to his dying day he asserted, and believed, that he had danced the brawl with Isole de Heton. "And never," he would say, "had mortal man such a partner."

From that night the two portraits in the banqueting-hall were regarded with great awe by the inmates of the Abbey.

CHAPTER X.

The nocturnal meeting.

On gaining the head of the staircase leading to the corridor, Mistress Nutter, whose movements had hitherto been extremely rapid, paused with her daughter to listen to the sounds arising from below. Suddenly was heard a loud cry, and the music, which had waxed fast and furious in order to keep pace with the frenzied boundings of the squire, ceased at once, showing some interruption had occurred, while from the confused noise that ensued, it was evident the sudden stoppage had been the result of accident. With blanched cheek Alizon listened, scarcely daring to look at her mother, whose expression of countenance, revealed by the lamp she held in her hand, almost frightened her; and it was a great relief to hear the voices and laughter of the serving-men as they came forth with Nicholas, and bore him towards another part of the mansion; and though much shocked, she was glad when one of them, who appeared to be Nicholas's own servant, assured the others "that it was only a drunken fit, and that the squire would wake up next morning as if nothing had happened."

Apparently satisfied with this explanation, Mistress Nutter moved on; but a new feeling of uneasiness came over Alizon as she followed her down the long dusky corridor, in the direction of the mysterious chamber, where they were to pass the night. The fitful flame of the lamp fell upon many a grim painting depicting the sufferings of the early martyrs; and these ghastly representations did not serve to re-assure her.

The grotesque carvings on the panels and ribs of the vaulted roof likewise impressed her with vague terror, and there was one large piece of sculpture — Saint Theodora subjected to diabolical temptation, as described in the Golden Legend, — that absolutely scared her. Their footsteps echoed hollowly overhead, and more than once, deceived by the sound, Alizon turned to see if any one was behind them. At the end of the corridor lay the room once occupied by the superior of the religious establishment, and still known from that circumstance as the "Abbot's Chamber." Connected with this apartment was the beautiful oratory built by Paslew, wherein he had kept his last vigils; and though now no longer applied to purposes of worship, still wearing from the character of its architecture, its sculptured ornaments, and the painted glass in its casements, a dim religious air. The Abbot's Room was allotted to Dorothy Assheton; and from its sombre magnificence, as well as the ghostly tales connected with it, had impressed her with so much superstitious misgiving, that she besought Alizon to share her couch with her, but the young girl did not dare to assent. Just, however, as Mistress Nutter was about to enter her own room, Dorothy appeared on the corridor, and calling to Alizon to stay a moment, flew quickly towards her, and renewed the proposition. Alizon looked at her mother, but the latter decidedly, and somewhat sternly, negatived it.

The young girls then said good night, kissing each other affectionately, after which Alizon entered the room with Mistress Nutter, and the door was closed. Two tapers were burning on the dressing-table, and their light fell upon the carved figures of the wardrobe, which still exercised the same weird influence over her. Mistress Nutter neither seemed disposed to retire to rest immediately, nor willing to talk, but sat down, and was soon lost in thought. After awhile, an impulse of curiosity which she could not resist, prompted Alizon

to peep into the closet, and pushing aside the tapestry partly drawn over the entrance, she held the lamp forward so as to throw its light into the little chamber. A mere glance was all she was allowed, but it sufficed to show her the large oak chest, though the monkish robe lately suspended above it, and which had particularly attracted her attention, was gone. Mistress Nutter had noticed the movement, and instantly and somewhat sharply recalled her.

As Alizon obeyed, a slight tap was heard at the door. The young girl turned pale, for in her present frame of mind any little matter affected her. Nor were her apprehensions materially allayed by the entrance of Dorothy, who looking white as a sheet, said she did not dare to remain in her own room, having been terribly frightened, by seeing a monkish figure in mouldering white garments, exactly resembling one of the carved images on the wardrobe, issue from behind the hangings on the wall and glide into the oratory, and she entreated Mistress Nutter to let Alizon go back with her. The request was peremptorily refused, and the lady, ridiculing Dorothy for her fears, bade her return, but she still lingered. This relation filled Alizon with inexpressible alarm, for though she did not dare to allude to the disappearance of the monkish gown, she could not help connecting the circumstance with the ghostly figure seen by Dorothy.

Unable otherwise to get rid of the terrified intruder, whose presence was an evident restraint to her, Mistress Nutter, at length, consented to accompany her to her room, and convince her of the folly of her fears, by an examination of the oratory. Alizon went with them, her mother not choosing to leave her behind, and indeed she herself was most anxious to go.

The Abbot's Chamber was large and gloomy, nearly twice the size of the room occupied by Mistress Nutter, but resembling it in many respects, as well as in the dusky hue of its

hangings and furniture, most of which had been undisturbed since the days of Paslew. The very bed, of carved oak, was that in which he had slept, and his arms were still displayed upon it, and on the painted glass of the windows. As Alizon entered she looked round with apprehension, but nothing occurred to justify her uneasiness. Having raised the arras, from behind which Dorothy averred the figure had issued, and discovering nothing but a panel of oak; with a smile of incredulity, Mistress Nutter walked boldly towards the oratory, the two girls, hand in hand, following tremblingly after her; but no fearful object met their view. A dressing-table, with a large mirror upon it, occupied the spot where the altar had formerly stood; but, in spite of this, and of other furniture, the little place of prayer, as has previously been observed, retained much of its original character, and seemed more calculated to inspire sentiments of devotional awe than any other.

After remaining for a short time in the oratory, during which she pointed out the impossibility of any one being concealed there, Mistress Nutter assured Dorothy she might rest quite easy that nothing further would occur to alarm her, and recommending her to lose the sense of her fears as speedily as she could in sleep, took her departure with Alizon.

But the recommendation was of little avail. The poor girl's heart died within her, and all her fromer terrors returned, and with additional force. Sitting down she looked fixedly at the hangings till her eyes ached, and then covering her face with her hands, and sarcely daring to breathe, she listened intently for the slightest sound. A rustle would have made her scream — but all was still as death, so profoundly quiet, that the very hush and silence became a new cause of disquietude, and longing for some cheerful sound to break it, she would have spoken aloud but from a fear of hearing her own voice. A

book lay before her, and she essayed to read it, but in vain. She was ever glancing fearfully round—ever listening intently. This state could not endure for ever, and feeling a drowsiness steal over her she yielded to it, and at length dropped asleep in her chair. Her dreams, however, were influenced by her mental condition, and slumber was no refuge, as promised by Mrs. Nutter, from the hauntings of terror.

At last a jarring sound aroused her, and she found she had been awakened by the clock striking twelve. Her lamp required trimming and burnt dimly, but by its imperfect light she saw the arras move. This could be no fancy, for the next moment the hangings were raised, and a figure looked from behind them; and this time it was not the monk, but a female robed in white. A glimpse of the figure was all Dorothy caught, for it instantly retreated, and the tapestry fell back to its place against the wall.

Scared by this apparition, Dorothy rushed out of the room so hurriedly that she forgot to take her lamp, and made her way, she scarcely knew how, to the adjoining chamber. She did not tap at the door, but trying it and finding it unfastened, opened it softly, and closed it after her, resolved if the occupants of the room were asleep not to disturb them, but to pass the night in a chair, the presence of some living beings beside her sufficing, in some degree, to dispel her terrors. The room was buried in darkness, the tapers being extinguished.

Advancing on tiptoe, she soon discovered a seat, when what was her surprise to find Alizon asleep within it. She was sure it was Alizon — for she had touched her hair and face, and she felt surprised that the contact had not awakened her. Still more surprised did she feel that the young girl had not retired to rest. Again she stepped forward in search of another chair, when a gleam of light suddenly shot from one side of the bed, and the tapestry, masking the entrance to the

closet, was slowly drawn aside. From behind it, the next moment, appeared the same female figure, robed in white, that she had previously beheld in the Abbot's Chamber. The figure held a lamp in one hand, and a small box in the other, and, to her unspeakable horror, disclosed the livid and contorted countenance of Mistress Nutter.

Dreadful though undefined suspicions crossed her mind, and she feared, if discovered, she should be sacrificed to the fury of this strange and terrible woman. Luckily, where she stood, though Mistress Nutter was revealed to her, she herself was screened from view by the hangings of the bed, and looking around for a hiding-place, she observed that the mysterious wardrobe, close behind her, was open, and without a moment's hesitation, she slipped into the covert and drew the door to, noiselessly. But her curiosity overmastered her fear, and firmly believing some magical rite was about to be performed, she sought for means of beholding it; nor was she long in discovering a small eylet-hole in the carving which commanded the room.

Unconscious of any other presence than that of Alizon, whose stupor appeared to occasion her no uneasiness, Mistress Nutter placed the lamp upon the table, made fast the door, and muttering some unintelligible words, unlocked the box. It contained two singularly-shaped glass vessels, the one filled with a bright sparkling liquid, and the other with a greenish-coloured unguent. Pouring forth a few drops of the liquid into a glass near her, Mistress Nutter swallowed them, and then, taking some of the unguent upon her hands, proceeded to anoint her face and neck with it, exclaiming, as she did so, "Emen hetan! Emen hetan!" — words that fixed themselves upon the listener's memory.

Wondering what would follow, Dorothy gazed on, when *she* suddenly lost sight of Mistress Nutter, and after looking

for her as far as her range of vision, limited by the aperture, would extend, she became convinced that she had left the room. All remaining quiet, she ventured, after awhile, to quit her hiding-place, and flying to Alizon, tried to waken her, but in vain. The poor girl retained the same moveless attitude, and appeared plunged in a deathly stupor.

Much frightened, Dorothy resolved to alarm the house, but some fears of Mistress Nutter restrained her, and she crept towards the closet to see whether that dread lady could be there. All was perfectly still, and somewhat emboldened, she returned to the table, where the box, which was left open and its contents unguarded, attracted her attention.

What was the liquid in the phial? What could it do? These were questions she asked herself, and longing to try the effect, she ventured at last to pour forth a few drops and taste it. It was like a potent distillation, and she became instantly sensible of a strange bewildering excitement. Presently her brain reeled, and she laughed wildly. Never before had she felt so light and buoyant, and wings seemed scarcely wanting to enable her to fly. An idea occurred to her. The wondrous liquid might arouse Alizon. The experiment should be tried at once, and, dipping her finger in the phial, she touched the lips of the sleeper, who sighed deeply and opened her eyes. Another drop, and Alizon was on her feet, gazing at her in astonishment, and laughing wildly as herself.

Poor girls! how wild and strange they looked — and how unlike themselves!

"Whither are you going?" cried Alizon.

"To the moon! to the stars! — anywhere!" rejoined Dorothy, with a laugh of frantic glee.

"I will go with you," cried Alizon, echoing the laugh.

"Here and there! — here and there!" exclaimed Dorothy, taking her hand. "Emen hetan! Emen hetan!"

As the mystic words were uttered they started away. It seemed as if no impediments could stop them; how they crossed the closet, passed through a sliding panel into the Abbot's Room, entered the oratory, and from it descended, by a secret staircase, to the garden they knew not—but there they were, gliding swiftly along in the moonlight, like winged spirits. What took them towards the conventual church they could not say. But they were drawn thither, as the ship was irresistibly dragged towards the loadstone rock described in the Eastern legend. Nothing surprised them then, or they might have been struck by the dense vapour, enveloping the monastic ruins, and shrouding them from view; nor was it until they entered the desecrated fabric, that any consciousness of what was passing around returned to them.

Their ears were then assailed by a wild hubbub of discordant sounds, hootings and croakings as of owls and ravens, shrieks and jarring cries as of nightbirds, bellowings as of cattle, groans and dismal sounds, mixed with unearthly laughter. Undefined and extraordinary shapes, whether men or women, beings of this world or of another they could not tell, though they judged them the latter, flew past with wild whoops and piercing cries, flapping the air as if with great leathern bat-like wings, or bestriding black, monstrous, misshapen steeds. Fantastical and grotesque were these objects, yet hideous and appalling. Now and then a red and fiery star would whiz crackling through the air, and then exploding break into numerous pale phosphoric lights, that danced awhile overhead, and then flitted away among the ruins. The ground seemed to heave and tremble beneath the footsteps, as if the graves were opening to give forth their dead, while toads and hissing reptiles crept forth.

Appalled, yet partly restored to herself by this confused and horrible din, Alizon stood still and kept fast hold of

Dorothy, who, seemingly under a stronger influence than herself, was drawn towards the eastern end of the fane, where a fire appeared to be blazing, a strong ruddy glare being cast upon the broken roof of the choir, and the mouldering arches around it. The noises around them suddenly ceased, and all the uproar seemed concentred near the spot where the fire was burning. Dorothy besought her friend so earnestly to let her see what was going forward, that Alizon reluctantly and tremblingly assented, and they moved slowly towards the transept, taking care to keep under the shelter of the columns.

On reaching the last pillar, behind which they remained, an extraordinary and fearful spectacle burst upon them. As they had supposed, a large fire was burning in the midst of the choir, the smoke of which ascending in eddying wreaths, formed a dark canopy overhead, where it was mixed with the steam issuing from a large black bubbling cauldron set on the blazing embers. Around the fire were ranged, in a wide circle, an assemblage of men and women, but chiefly the latter, and of these almost all old, hideous, and of malignant aspect, their grim and sinister features looking ghastly in the lurid light. Above them, amid the smoke and steam, wheeled bat and flittermouse, horned owl and screech-owl, in mazy circles. The weird assemblage chattered together in some wild jargon, mumbling and muttering spells and incantations, chanting fearfully with hoarse, cracked voices a wild chorus, and anon breaking into a loud and long-continued peal of laughter. Then there was more mumbling, chattering, and singing, and one of the troop producing a wallet, hobbled forward.

She was a fearful old crone; hunchbacked, toothless, bleareyed, bearded, halt, with huge gouty feet swathed in flannel. As she cast in the ingredients one by one, she chanted thus:—

"Head of monkey, brain of cat,
Eye of weasel, tail of rat,
Juice of mugwort, mastic, myrrh —
All within the pot I stir."

"Well sung, Mother Mouldheels," cried a little old man, whose doublet and hose were of rusty black, with a short cloak, of the same hue, over his shoulders. "Well sung, Mother Mouldheels," he cried, advancing as the old witch retired, amidst a roar of laughter from the others, and chanting as he filled the cauldron: —

"Here is foam from a mad dog's lips,
Gathered beneath the moon's eclipse,
Ashes of a shroud consumed,
And with deadly vapour fumed.
These within the mess I cast —
Stir the cauldron — stir it fast!"

A red-haired witch then took his place, singing, —

"Here are snakes from out the river,
Bones of toad and sea-calf's liver;
Swine's flesh fattened on her brood,
Wolf's tooth, hare's foot, weasel's blood.
Skull of ape and fierce baboon,
And panther spotted like the moon;
Feathers of the horned owl,
Daw, pie, and other fatal fowl.
Fruit from fig-tree never sown,
Seed from cypress never grown.
All within the mess I cast,
Stir the cauldron — stir it fast!"

Nance Redferne then advanced, and taking from her wallet a small clay image, tricked out in attire intended to resemble that of James Device, plunged several pins deeply into its breast, singing as she did so, thus, —

"In his likeness it is moulded,
In his vestments 't is enfolded.
Ye may know it, as I show it!
In its breast sharp pins I stick,
And I drive them to the quick.

They are in — they are in —
And the wretch's pangs begin.
Now his heart,
Feels the smart;
Through his marrow,
Sharp as arrow,
Torments quiver
He shall shiver,
He shall burn,
He shall toss, and he shall turn.
Unavailingly.
Aches shall rack him,
Cramps attack him;
He shall wail,
Strength shall fail,
Till he die
Miserably!"

As Nance retired, another witch advanced, and sung thus:—

"Over mountain, over valley, over woodland, over waste,
On our gallant broomsticks riding we have come with frantic haste,
And the reason of our coming, as ye wot well, is to see
Who this night, as new-made witch, to our ranks shall added be."

A wild burst of laughter followed this address, and another wizard succeeded, chanting thus: —

"Beat the water, Demdike's daughter!
Till the tempest gather o'er us;
Till the thunder strike with wonder
And the lightnings flash before us!
Beat the water, Demdike's daughter!
Ruin seize our foes and slaughter!"

As the words were uttered, a woman stepped from out the circle, and throwing back the gray-hooded cloak in which she was enveloped, disclosed the features of Elizabeth Device. Her presence in that fearful assemblage occasioned no surprise to Alizon, though it increased her horror. A pail of water was next set before the witch, and a broom being placed in her hand, she struck the lymph with it, sprinkling it aloft, and uttering this spell: —

"Mount, water. to the skies!
Bid the sudden storm arise.
Bid the pitchy clouds advance,
Bid the forked lightnings glance,
Bid the angry thunder growl,
Bid the wild wind fiercely howl!
Bid the tempest come amain.
Thunder, lightning, wind, and rain!"

As she concluded, clouds gathered thickly overhead, obscuring the stars that had hitherto shone down from the heavens. The wind suddenly arose, but in lieu of dispersing the vapours it seemed only to condense them. A flash of forked lightning cut through the air, and a loud peal of thunder rolled overhead.

Then the whole troop sang together —

"Beat the water, Demdike's daughter!
See the tempest gathers o'er us,
Lightning flashes — thunder crashes,
Wild winds sing in lusty chorus!"

For a brief space the storm raged fearfully, and recalled the terror of that previously witnessed by Alizon, which she now began to think might have originated in a similar manner. The wind raved around the ruined pile, but its breath was not felt within it, and the rain was heard descending in deluging showers without, though no drop came through the open roof. The thunder shook the walls and pillars of the old fabric, and threatened to topple them down from their foundations, but they resisted the shocks. The lightning played around the tall spire springing from this part of the fane, and ran down from its shattered summit to its base, without doing any damage. The red bolts struck the ground innocuously, though they fell at the very feet of the weird assemblage, who laughed wildly at the awful tumult.

Whilst the storm was at its worst, while the lightning was flashing fiercely, and the thunder rattling loudly, Mother

Chattox, with a chafing-dish in her hand, advanced towards the fire, and placing the pan upon it, threw certain herbs and roots into it, chanting thus: —

"Here is juice of poppy bruised,
With black hellebore infused;
Here is mandrake's bleeding root,
Mixed with moonshade's deadly fruit;
Viper's bag with venom filled,
Taken ere the beast was killed;
Adder's skin and raven's feather,
With shell of beetle blent together;
Dragonwort and barbatus,
Hemlock black and poisonous;
Horn of hart, and storax red,
Lapwing's blood, at midnight shed.
In the heated pan they burn,
And to pungent vapours turn.
By this strong suffumigation,
By this potent invocation,
Spirits! I compel you here!
All who list my call appear!"

After a moment's pause, she resumed as follows: —

"White-robed brethren, who of old,
Nightly paced yon cloisters cold,
Sleeping now beneath the mould!
I bid ye rise.

"Abbots! by the weakling feared,
By the credulous revered,
Who this mighty fabric reared!
I bid ye rise!

"And thou last and guilty one!
By thy lust of power undone,
Whom in death thy fellows shun!
I bid thee come!

"And thou fair one, who disdained
To keep the vows thy lips had feigned;
And thy snowy garments stained!
I bid thee come!"

During this invocation, the glee of the assemblage ceased, and they looked around in hushed expectation of the result.

Slowly then did a long procession of monkish forms, robed in white, glide along the aisles, and gather round the altar. The brass-covered stones within the presbytery were lifted up, as if they moved on hinges, and from the yawning graves beneath them arose solemn shapes, sixteen in number, each with mitre on head and crosier in hand, which likewise proceeded to the altar. Then a loud cry was heard, and from a side chapel burst the monkish form, in mouldering garments, which Dorothy had seen enter the oratory, and which would have mingled with its brethren at the altar, but they waved it off menacingly. Another piercing shriek followed, and a female shape, habited like a nun, and of surpassing loveliness, issued from the opposite chapel, and hovered near the fire. Content with this proof of her power, Mother Chattox waved her hand, and the long shadowy train glided off as they came. The ghostly abbots returned to their tombs, and the stones closed over them. But the shades of Paslew and Isole de Heton still lingered.

The storm had well nigh ceased, the thunder rolled hollowly at intervals, and a flash of lightning now and then licked the walls. The weird crew had resumed their rites, when the door of the Lacy Chapel flew open, and a tall female figure came forward.

Alizon doubted if she beheld aright. Could that terrific woman in the strangely-fashioned robe of white, girt by a brazen zone graven with mystic characters, with a long glittering blade in her hand, infernal fury in her wildly-rolling orbs, the livid hue of death on her cheeks, and the red brand upon her brow — could that fearful woman, with the black dishevelled tresses floating over her bare shoulders, and whose gestures were so imperious, be Mistress Nutter? Mother no longer, if it indeed were she! How came she there *amid* that weird assemblage? Why did they so humbly salute

her, and fall prostrate before her, kissing the hem of her garment? Why did she stand proudly in the midst of them, and extend her hand, armed with the knife, over them? Was she their sovereign mistress, that they bent so lowly at her coming, and rose so reverentially at her bidding? Was this terrible woman, now seated on a dilapidated tomb, and regarding the dark conclave with the eye of a queen who held their lives in her hands — was she her mother? Oh, no! — no! — it could not be! It must be some fiend, that usurped her likeness.

Still, though Alizon thus strove to discredit the evidence of her senses, and to hold all she saw to be delusion, and the work of darkness, she could not entirely convince herself, but imperfectly recalling the fearful vision she had witnessed during her former stupor, began to connect it with the scene now passing before her. The storm had wholly ceased, and the stars again twinkled down through the shattered roof. Deep silence prevailed, broken only by the hissing and bubbling of the cauldron.

Alizon's gaze was rivetted upon her mother, whose slightest gestures she watched. After numbering the assemblage thrice, Mistress Nutter majestically arose, and motioning Mother Chattox towards her, the old witch tremblingly advanced, and some words passed between them, the import of which did not reach the listener's ear. In conclusion, however, Mistress Nutter exclaimed aloud, in accents of command — "Go, bring it at once, the sacrifice must be made." — And on this, Mother Chattox hobbled off to one of the side chapels.

A mortal terror seized Alizon, and she could scarcely draw breath. Dark tales had been told her that unbaptised infants were sometimes sacrificed by witches, and their flesh boiled and devoured at their impious banquets, and dreading lest

some such atrocity was now about to be practised, she mustered all her resolution, determined, at any risk, to interfere, and, if possible, prevent its accomplishment.

In another moment, Mother Chattox returned, bearing some living thing, wrapped in a white cloth, which struggled feebly for liberation, apparently confirming Alizon's suspicions, and she was about to rush forward, when Mistress Nutter, snatching the bundle from the old witch, opened it, and disclosed a beautiful bird, with plumage white as driven snow, whose legs were tied together, so that it could not escape. Conjecturing what was to follow, Alizon averted her eyes, and when she looked round again the bird had been slain, while Mother Chattox was in the act of throwing its body into the cauldron, muttering a charm as she did so. Mistress Nutter held the ensanguined knife aloft, and casting some ruddy drops upon the glowing embers, pronounced, as they hissed and smoked, the following adjuration: —

"Thy aid I seek, infernal Power!
Be thy Word sent to Malkin Tower,
That the beldame old may know
Where I will, thoudst have her go —
What I will, thoudst have her do!"

An immediate response was made by an awful voice issuing apparently from the bowels of the earth.

"Thou who seek'st the Demon's aid,
Know'st the price that must be paid."

The queen witch rejoined —

"I do. But grant the aid I crave,
And that thou wishest thou shalt have.
Another worshipper is won,
Thine to be, when all is done."

Again the deep voice spake, with something of mockery in *its* accents: —

"Enough, proud witch, I am content.
To Malkin Tower the Word is sent.
Forth to her task the beldame goes,
And where she points the streamlet flows;
Its customary bed forsaking,
Another distant channel making.
Round about like elfets tripping,
Stock and stone, and tree, are skipping
Halting where she plants her staff,
With a wild exulting laugh.
Ho! ho! 't is a merry sight,
Thou hast given the hag to-night.

Lo! the sheep-fold, and the herd,
To another site are stirr'd!
And the rugged lime-stone quarry,
Where 't was digg'd, may no more tarry
While the goblin-haunted dingle,
With another dell must mingle.
Pendle Moor is in commotion,
Like the billows of the ocean,
When the winds are o'er it ranging,
Heaving, falling, bursting, changing.
Ho! ho! 't is a merry sight.
Thou hast given the hag to-night.

Lo! the moss-pool sudden flies,
In another spot to rise;
And the scanty-grown plantation,
Finds another situation,
And a more congenial soil,
Without needing woodman's toil.
Now the warren moves — and see!
How the burrowing rabbits flee,
Hither, thither till they find it,
With another brake behind it,
Ho! ho! 't is a merry sight
Thou hast given the hag to-night.

Lo! new lines the witch is tracing,
Every well-known mark effacing,
Elsewhere, other bounds erecting,
So the old there 's no detecting.
Ho! ho! 't is a pastime quite,
Thou hast given the hag to-night!

The hind, at eve, who wandered o'er
The dreary waste of Pendle Moor,

Shall wake at dawn, and in surprise,
Doubt the strange sight that meets his eyes.
The pathway leading to his hut
Winds differently, — the gate is shut;
The ruin on the right that stood,
Lies on the left, and nigh the wood;
The paddock fenced with wall of stone,
Well-stocked with kine, a mile hath flown,
The sheepfold and the herd are gone.
Through channels new the brooklet rushes,
Its ancient course concealed by bushes.
Where the hollow was, a mound
Rises from the upheaved ground.
Doubting, shouting with surprise,
How the fool stares, and rubs his eyes!
All 's so changed, the simple elf
Fancies he is changed himself!
Ho! ho! 't is a merry sight
The hag shall have when dawns the light.
But see! she halts and waves her hand,
All is done as thou hast plann'd."

After a moment's pause the voice added, —

"I have done as thou hast will'd —
Now be thy part straight fulfilled."

"It shall be," replied Mistress Nutter, whose features gleamed with fierce exultation. "Bring forth the proselyte!" she shouted.

And at the words, her swarthy serving-man, Blackadder, came forth from the Lacy Chapel, leading Jennet by the hand. They were followed by Tib, who dilated to twice his former size, walked with tail erect, and eyes glowing like carbuncles.

At sight of her daughter a loud cry of rage and astonishment burst from Elizabeth Device, and rushing forward, she would have seized her, if Tib had not kept her off by a formidable display of teeth and talons. Jennet made no effort to join her mother, but regarded her with a malicious and triumphant grin.

"This is my chilt," screamed Elizabeth. "She canna be baptised without my consent, an ey refuse it. Ey dunna want

her to be a witch — at least not yet awhile. What mays yo here, yo little plague?"

"Ey wur brought here, mother," replied Jennet, with affected simplicity.

"Then get whoam at once, and keep there," rejoined Elizabeth, furiously.

"Nay, eyst nah go just yet," replied Jennet. "Ey'd fain be a witch as weel as yo."

"Ho! ho! ho!" laughed the voice from below.

"Nah, nah — ey forbid it," shrieked Elizabeth, "ye shanna be bapteesed. Whoy ha ye brought her here, Madam?" she added, to Mistress Nutter. "Yo ha' stolen her fro' me. Boh ey protest agen it."

"Your consent is not required," replied Mistress Nutter, waving her off. "Your daughter is anxious to become a witch. That is enough."

"She is not owd enough to act for herself," said Elizabeth.

"Age matters not," replied Mistress Nutter.

"What mun ey do to become a witch?" asked Jennet.

"You must renounce all hopes of Heaven," replied Mistress Nutter, "and devote yourself to Satan. You will then be baptised in his name, and become one of his worshippers. You will have power to afflict all persons with bodily ailments — to destroy cattle — blight corn — burn dwellings — and, if you be so minded, kill those you hate, or who molest you. Do you desire to do all this?"

"Eigh, that ey do," replied Jennet. "Ey ha' more pleasure in evil than in good, an wad rayther see folk weep than laugh; an if ey had the power, ey wad so punish them os jeer at me, that they should rue it to their deein' day."

"All this you shall do, and more," rejoined Mistress Nutter. "You renounce all hopes of salvation, then, and devote yourself, soul and body, to the Powers of Darkness."

Elizabeth, who was still kept at bay by Tib, shaking her arms, and gnashing her teeth, in impotent rage, now groaned aloud; but ere Jennet could answer, a piercing cry was heard, which thrilled through Mistress Nutter's bosom, and Alizon, rushing from her place of concealment, passed through the weird circle, and stood beside the group in the midst of it.

"Forbear, Jennet," she cried; "forbear! Pronounce not those impious words, or you are lost for ever. Come with me, and I will save you."

"Sister Alizon," cried Jennet, staring at her, in surprise, "what makes you here?"

"Do not ask — but come," cried Alizon, trying to take her hand.

"Oh! what is this?" cried Mistress Nutter, now partly recovered from the consternation and astonishment into which she had been thrown by Alizon's unexpected appearance. "Why are you here? How have you broken the chains of slumber in which I bound you? Fly — fly — at once, this girl is past your help. You cannot save her. She is already devoted. Fly. I am powerless to protect you here."

"Ho! ho! ho!" laughed the voice.

"Do you not hear that laughter?" cried Mistress Nutter, with a haggard look. "Go!"

"Never, without Jennet," replied Alizon, firmly.

"My child — my child — on my knees I implore you to depart," cried Mistress Nutter, throwing herself before her — "You know not your danger — oh, fly — fly!"

But Alizon continued inflexible.

"Yo are caught i' your own snare, Madam," cried Elizabeth Device, with a taunting laugh. "Sin Jennet mun be a witch, Alizon con be bapteesed os weel. Your consent is not *required* — and age matters not — ha! ha!"

"Curses upon thy malice," cried Mistress Nutter, rising. "What can be done in this extremity?"

"Nothing," replied the voice. "Jennet is mine already. If not brought hither by thee, or by her mother, she would have come of her own accord. I have watched her, and marked her for my own. Besides, she is fated. The curse of Paslew clings to her."

As the words were uttered, the shade of the abbot glided forwards, and touching the shuddering child upon the brow with its finger, vanished with a lamentable cry.

"Kneel, Jennet," cried Alizon, "kneel and pray!"

"To me," rejoined the voice, "she can bend to no other power. Alice Nutter, thou hast sought to deceive me, but in vain. I bade thee bring thy daughter here, and in place of her thou offerest me the child of another, who is mine already. I am not to be thus trifled with. Thou knowest my will. Sprinkle water over her head, and devote her to me."

Alizon would fain have thrown herself on her knees, but extremity of horror, or some overmastering influence held her fast; and she remained with her gaze fixed upon her mother, who seemed torn by conflicting emotions.

"Is there no way to avoid this?" cried Mistress Nutter.

"No way but one," replied the voice. "I have been offered a new devotee, and I claim fulfilment of the promise. Thy daughter or another, it matters not — but not Jennet."

"I embrace the alternative," cried Mistress Nutter.

"It must be done upon the instant," said the voice.

"It shall be," replied Mistress Nutter. And stretching her arm in the direction of the mansion, she called in a loud imperious voice, "Dorothy Assheton, come hither!"

A minute elapsed, but no one appeared, and with a look of disappointment, Mistress Nutter repeated the gesture and the words.

Still no one came.

"Baffled!" she exclaimed, "what can it mean?"

"There is a maiden within the south transept, who is not one of my servants," cried the voice. "Call her."

"'T is she!" cried Mistress Nutter, stretching her arm towards the transept. "This time I am answered," she added, as with a wild laugh, Dorothy obeyed the summons.

"I have anointed myself with the unguent, and drank of the potion, ha! ha! ha!" cried Dorothy, with a wild gesture, and wilder laughter.

"Ha! this accounts for her presence here," muttered Mistress Nutter. "But it could not be better. She is in no mood to offer resistance. Dorothy, thou shalt be a witch."

"A witch!" exclaimed the bewildered maiden. "Is Alizon a witch?"

"We are all witches here," replied Mistress Nutter.

Alizon had no power to contradict her.

"A merry company!" exclaimed Dorothy, laughing loudly.

"You will say so anon," replied Mistress Nutter, waving her hand over her, and muttering a spell; "but you see them not in their true forms, Dorothy. Look again — what do you behold now?"

"In place of a troop of old wrinkled crones in wretched habiliments," replied Dorothy, "I behold a band of lovely nymphs in light gauzy attire, wreathed with flowers, and holding myrtle and olive branches in their hands. See they rise, and prepare for the dance. Strains of ravishing music salute the ear. I never heard sounds so sweet and stirring. The round is formed. The dance begins. How gracefully — how lightly they move — ha! ha!"

Alizon could not check her — could not undeceive her — for power of speech as of movement was denied her, but she

comprehended the strange delusion under which the poor girl laboured. The figures Dorothy described as young and lovely were still to her the same loathsome and abhorrent witches; the ravishing music jarred discordantly on her ear, as if produced by a shrill cornemuse; and the lightsome dance was a fantastic round performed with shouts and laughter by the whole unhallowed crew.

Jennet laughed immoderately, and seemed delighted by the antics of the troop.

"Ey never wished to dance efore," she cried, "boh ey should like to try now."

"Join them, then," said Mistress Nutter.

And to the little girl's infinite delight a place was made for her in the round, and taking hands with Mother Mouldheels and the red-haired witch, she footed it as merrily as the rest.

"Who is she in the nunlike habit?" inquired Dorothy, pointing to the shade of Isole de Heton, which still hovered near the weird assemblage. "She seems more beautiful than all the others. Will she not dance with me?"

"Heed her not," said Mistress Nutter.

Dorothy, however, would not be gainsaid, but spite of the caution, beckoned the figure towards her. It came at once, and in another instant its arms were enlaced around her. The same frenzy that had seized Nicholas now took possession of Dorothy, and her dance with Isole might have come to a similar conclusion, if it had not been abruptly checked by Mistress Nutter, who, waving her hand, and pronouncing a spell, the figure instantly quitted Dorothy, and with a wild shriek, fled.

"How like you these diversions?" said Mistress Nutter, to the panting and almost breathless maiden.

"Marvellously," replied Dorothy, "but why have you scared my partner away?"

"Because she would have done you a mischief," rejoined Mistress Nutter. "But now let me put a question to you. Are you willing to renounce your baptism, and enter into a covenant with the Prince of Darkness?"

Dorothy did not seem in the least to comprehend what was said to her; but she, nevertheless, replied "I am."

"Bring water and salt," said Mistress Nutter to Mother Chattox. "By these drops I baptise you," she added, dipping her fingers in the liquid, and preparing to sprinkle it over the brow of the proselyte.

Then it was that Alizon by an almost superhuman effort burst the spell that bound her, and clasped Dorothy in her arms.

"You know not what you do, dear Dorothy," she cried. "I answer for you. You will not yield to the snares and temptations of Satan, however subtly devised. You defy him and all his works. You will make no covenant with him. Though surrounded by his bond-slaves you fear him not. It is not so? Speak!"

But Dorothy could only answer with an insane laugh — "I will be a witch."

"It is too late," interposed Mistress Nutter. "You cannot save her. And remember! she stands in your place. Or you or she must be devoted."

"I will never desert her," cried Alizon, twining her arms round her. "Dorothy — dear Dorothy — address yourself to Heaven."

An angry growl of thunder was heard.

"Beware!" cried Mistress Nutter.

"I am not to be discouraged," rejoined Alizon, firmly. "You cannot gain a victory over a soul in this condition, and I shall effect her deliverance. Heaven will aid us, Dorothy."

A louder roll of thunder was heard, followed by a forked flash of lightning.

"Provoke not the vengeance of the Prince of Darkness," said Mistress Nutter.

"I have no fear," replied Alizon. "Cling to me, Dorothy. No harm shall befall you."

"Be speedy," cried the voice.

"Let her go," cried Mrs. Nutter to Alizon, "or you will rue this disobedience. Why should you interfere with my projects, and bring ruin on yourself! I would save you. What, still obstinate. Nay, then, I will no longer show forbearance. Help me, sisters. Force the new witch from her. But beware how you harm my child."

At these words the troop gathered round the two girls. But Alizon only clasped her hands more tightly round Dorothy; while the latter, on whose brain the maddening potion still worked, laughed frantically at them. It was at this moment, that Elizabeth Device, who had conceived a project of revenge, put it into execution. While near Dorothy, she stamped, spat on the ground, and then cast a little mould over her, breathing in her ear, "Thou art bewitched — bewitched by Alizon Device."

Dorothy instantly struggled to free herself from Alizon.

"Oh! do not you strive against me, dear Dorothy," cried Alizon. "Remain with me, or you are lost."

"Hence! off! set me free!" shrieked Dorothy, "you have bewitched me. I heard it this moment."

"Do not believe the false suggestion," cried Alizon.

"It is true," exclaimed all the other witches together. "Alizon has bewitched you — and will kill you. Shake her off, shake her off!"

"Away!" cried Dorothy, mustering all her force. "Away!"

But Alizon was still too strong for her, and, in spite of her efforts at liberation, detained her.

"My patience is well nigh exhausted," exclaimed the voice.

"Alizon!" cried Mistress Nutter, imploringly.

And again the witches gathered furiously round the two girls.

"Kneel, Dorothy, kneel!" whispered Alizon. And forcing her down, she fell on her knees beside her, exclaiming with uplifted hands "Gracious heaven! deliver us."

As the words were uttered a fearful cry was heard, and the weird troop fled away screaming, like ill-omened birds. The cauldron sank into the ground; the dense mist arose like a curtain; and the moon and stars shone brightly down upon the ruined pile.

Alizon prayed long and fervently, with clasped hands and closed eyes, for deliverance from evil. When she looked round again all was so calm, so beautiful, so holy in its rest, that she could scarcely believe in the recent fearful occurrences. Her hair and garments were damp with the dews of night; and at her feet lay Dorothy, insensible.

She tried to raise her — to revive her, but in vain; when at this moment footsteps were heard approaching, and the next moment, Mistress Nutter, accompanied by Adam Whitworth, and some other serving-men entered the choir.

"I see them — they are here!" cried the lady, rushing forward.

"Heaven be praised, you have found them, Madam!" exclaimed the old steward, coming quickly after her.

"Oh! what an alarm you have given me, Alizon," said Mistress Nutter. "What could induce you to go forth secretly at night in this way with Dorothy! I dreamed you were here, and missing you when I awoke, roused the house, and came in search of you. What is the matter with Dorothy? She has been frightened, I suppose. I will give her to breathe at this phial. It will revive her. See, she opens her eyes."

Dorothy looked round wildly for a moment, and then, pointing her finger at Alizon, said

"She has bewitched me."

"Poor thing! she rambles," observed Mistress Nutter, to Adam Whitworth, who with the other serving-men stared aghast at the accusation; "she has been scared out of her senses by some fearful sight. Let her be conveyed quickly to my chamber, and I will see her cared for."

The orders were obeyed. Dorothy was raised gently by the serving-men, but she still kept pointing to Alizon, and repeatedly exclaimed

"She has bewitched me."

The serving-men shook their heads, and looked significantly at each other, while Mistress Nutter lingered to speak to her daughter.

"You look greatly disturbed, Alizon, as if you had been visited by a nightmare in your sleep, and were still under its influence."

Alizon made no reply.

"A few hours' tranquil sleep will restore you," pursued Mistress Nutter, "and you will forget your fears. You must not indulge in these nocturnal rambles again, or they may be attended with dangerous consequences. I may not have a second warning dream. Come to the house."

And, as Alizon followed her along the garden path, she could not help asking herself, though with little hope in the question, if all she had witnessed was indeed nothing more than a troubled dream.

END OF THE FIRST BOOK.

BOOK THE SECOND.

PENDLE FOREST.

BOOK THE SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

Flint.

A LOVELY morning succeeded the strange and terrible night. Brightly shone the sun upon the fair Calder as it winded along the green meads above the bridge, as it rushed rejoicingly over the weir, and pursued its rapid course through the broad plain below the Abbey. A few white vapours hung upon the summit of Whalley Nab, but the warm rays tinging them with gold, and tipping with fire the tree-tops that pierced through them, augured their speedy dispersion. So beautiful, so tranquil, looked the old monastic fane, that none would have deemed its midnight rest had been broken by the impious rites of a foul troop. The choir where the unearthly scream and the demon laughter had resounded was now vocal with the melodies of the blackbird, the thrush, and other songsters of the grove. Bells of dew glittered upon the bushes rooted in the walls, and upon the ivy-grown pillars; and gemming the countless spiders' webs stretched from bough to bough showed they were all unbroken. No traces were visible on the sod where the unhallowed crew had danced their round; nor were any ashes left where the fire had burnt and the cauldron had bubbled. The brass-covered tombs of the abbots in the presbytery looked as if a century had passed over them without disturbance, while the graves in the cloister cemetery, obliterated, and only to be detected when a broken coffin or a moul-

dering bone was turned up by the tiller of the ground, preserved their wonted appearance. The face of nature had received neither impress nor injury from the fantastic freaks and necromantic exhibitions of the witches. Every thing looked as it was left overnight; and the only foot-prints to be detected were those of the two girls, and of the party who came in quest of them. All else had passed by like a vision or a dream. The rooks cawed loudly in the neighbouring trees, as if discussing the question of breakfast, and the jack-daws wheeled merrily round the tall spire, which sprang from the eastern end of the fane.

Brightly shone the sun upon the noble timber embowering the mansion of the Asshetons; upon the ancient gateway, in the upper chamber of which Ned Huddlestone, the porter, and the burly representative of Friar Tuck was rubbing his sleepy eyes, preparatory to habiting himself in his ordinary attire; and upon the wide court-yard, across which Nicholas was walking in the direction of the stables. Notwithstanding his excesses overnight, the squire was astir, as he had declared he should be, before daybreak; and a plunge into the Calder had cooled his feverish limbs and cured his racking head-ache, while a draught of ale set his stomach right. Still, in modern parlance, he looked rather "seedy," and his recollection of the events of the previous night was somewhat confused. Aware he had committed many fooleries, he did not desire to investigate matters too closely, and only hoped he should not be reminded of them by Sir Ralph, or worse still, by Parson Dewhurst. As to his poor, dear, uncomplaining wife, he never once troubled his head about her, feeling quite sure she would not upbraid him. On his appearance in the court-yard, the two noble blood-hounds, and several lesser dogs came forward to greet him, and attended by this noisy pack, he marched up to a groom, who was rubbing down his horse at the stable-door.

"Poor Robin," he cried to the steed, who neighed at his approach. "Poor Robin," he said, patting his neck affectionately, "there is not thy match for speed or endurance, for fence or ditch, for beck or stone wall, in the country. Half an hour on thy back will make all right with me, but I would rather take thee to Bowland Forest, and hunt the stag there, than go and perambulate the boundaries of the Rough Lee estates with a rascally attorney. I wonder how the fellow will be mounted."

"If yo be speering about Mester Potts, squoire," observed the groom, "ey con tell ye. He's to ha' little Flint, the Welsh pony."

"Why, zounds, you don't say, Peter!" exclaimed Nicholas, laughing; "he'll never be able to manage him. Flint 's the wickedest, and most wilful little brute I ever knew. We shall have Master Potts run away with, or thrown into a moss-pit. Better give him something quieter."

"It 's Sir Roaph's orders," replied Peter, "an ey darna disobey 'em. Boh Flint 's far steadier than when yo seed him last, squoire. Ey dar say he'll carry Mester Potts weel enough, if he dusna mislest him."

"You think nothing of the sort, Peter," said Nicholas. "Yo expect to see the little gentleman fly over the pony's head, and perhaps break his own, at starting. But if Sir Ralph has ordered it, he must abide by the consequences. I shan't interfere further. How goes on the young colt you were breaking in? You should take care to show him the saddle in the manger, let him smell it, and jingle the stirrups in his ears, before you put it on his back. Better ground for his first lessons could not be desired, than the field below the grange, near the Calder. Sir Ralph was saying yesterday, that the roan mare had pricked her foot. You must wash the sore well with white wine and salt, rub it with the ointment the farriers call

œgyptiacum, and then put upon it a hot plaister compounded of flax hards, turpentine, oil and wax, bathing the top of the hoof with bole armeniac and vinegar. This is the best and quickest remedy. And recollect, Peter, that for a new strain, vinegar, bole armeniac, whites of eggs, and bean-flower make the best salve. How goes on Sir Ralph's black charger Dragon? A brave horse that, Peter, and the only one in your master's whole stud to compare with my Robin! But Dragon, though of high courage and great swiftness, has not the strength and endurance of Robin—neither can he leap so well. Why Robin would almost clear the Calder, Peter, and makes nothing of Smithies Brook, near Downham, and you know how wide that stream is. I once tried him at the Ribble, at a narrow point, and if horse could have done it, he would — but it was too much to expect."

"A great deal, ey should say, squoire," replied the groom, opening his eyes to their widest extent. "Whoy, th' Ribble, where yo speak on, mun be twenty yards across, if it be an inch; and no nag os ever wur bred could clear that, onless a witch wur on his back."

"Don't allude to witches, Peter," said Nicholas. "I 've had enough of them. But to come back to our steeds. Colour is matter of taste, and a man must please his own eye with bay or gray, chestnut, sorrel, or black; but dun is my fancy. A good horse, Peter, should be clean-limbed, short-jointed, strong-hoofed, out-ribbed, broad-chested, deep-necked, loose-throttled, thin-crested, lean-headed, full-eyed, with wide nostrils. A horse with half these points would not be wrong, and Robin has them all."

"So he has sure enough, squoire," replied Peter, regarding the animal with an approving eye, as Nicholas enumerated his merits. "Boh, if ey might choose betwixt him an yunk

Mester Ruchot Assheton's gray gelding, Merlin, ey knoas which ey'd tak."

"Robin, of course," said Nicholas.

"Nah, squoire, it should be t' other," replied the groom.

"You 're no judge of a horse, Peter," rejoined Nicholas, shrugging his shoulders.

"May be not," said the groom, "boh ey'm bound to speak truth. An see! Tum Lomax is bringin' out Merlin. We con put th' two nags soide by soide, if yo choose."

"They shall be put side by side in the field, Peter — that 's the way to test their respective merit," returned Nicholas, "and they won't remain long together, I'll warrant you. I offered to make a match for twenty pieces with Master Richard, but he declined the offer. Harkee, Peter, break an egg in Robin's mouth before you put on his bridle. It strengthens the wind, and adds to a horse's power of endurance. You understand."

"Parfitly, squoire," replied the groom. "By th' mess! that 's a secret worth knoain'. Onny more orders?"

"No," replied Nicholas. "We shall set out in an hour—or it may be sooner."

"Aw shan be ready," said Peter. And he added to himself, as Nicholas moved away, "Ey'st tak care Tom Lomax gies an egg to Merlin, an that 'll may aw fair, if they chance to try their osses' mettle."

As Nicholas returned to the house, he perceived to his dismay Sir Ralph and Parson Dewhurst standing upon the steps, and convinced, from their grave looks, that they were prepared to lecture him, he endeavoured to nerve himself for the infliction.

"Two to one are awkward odds," said the squire, to himself, "especially when they have the 'vantage ground. But I must face them, and make the best fight circumstances will

allow. I shall never be able to explain that mad dance with Isole de Heton. No one but Dick will believe me, and the chances are he will not support my story. But I must put on an air of penitence, and sooth to say, in my present state, it is not very difficult to assume."

Thus pondering, with slow step, affectedly humble demeanour, and surprisingly-lengthened visage, he approached the pair who were waiting for him, and regarding him with severe looks.

Thinking it the best plan to open the fire himself, Nicholas saluted them, and said,

"Give you good day, Sir Ralph, and you, too, worthy Master Dewhurst. I scarcely expected to see you so early astir, good sirs, but the morning is too beautiful to allow us to be sluggards. For my own part I have been awake for hours, and have passed the time wholly in self-reproaches for my folly and sinfulness last night, as well as in forming resolutions for self-amendment, and better governance in future."

"I hope you will adhere to those resolutions, then, Nicholas," rejoined Sir Ralph, sternly; "for change of conduct is absolutely necessary, if you would maintain your character as a gentleman. I can make allowance for high animal spirits. and can excuse some licence, though I do not approve of it, but I will not permit decorum to be outraged in my house, and suffer so ill an example to be set to my tenantry."

"Fortunately, I was not present at the exhibition," said Dewhurst, "but I am told you conducted yourself like one possessed, and committed such freaks as are rarely, if ever, acted by a rational being."

"I can offer no defence, worthy Sir, and you my respected relative," returned Nicholas, with a contrite air; "neither can you reprove me more strongly than I deserve, nor than I upbraid myself. I allowed myself to be overcome by wine, and

in that condition was undoubtedly guilty of follies I must ever regret."

"Amongst others, I believe you stood upon your head," remarked Dewhurst.

"I am not aware of the circumstance, reverend Sir," replied Nicholas, with difficulty repressing a smile; "but as I certainly lost my head, I may have stood upon it unconsciously. But I do recollect enough to make me heartily ashamed of myself, and determine to avoid all such excesses n future."

"In that case, Sir," rejoined Dewhurst, "the occurrences of last night, though sufficiently discreditable to you, will not be without profit; for I have observed, to my infinite regret, that you are apt to indulge in immoderate potations, and when under their influence, to lose due command of yourself, and commit follies which your sober reason must condemn. At such times I scarcely recognise you. You speak with unbecoming levity, and even allow oaths to escape your lips."

"It is too true, reverend Sir," said Nicholas; "but, zounds! — a plague upon my tongue — it is an unruly member. Forgive me, good Sir, but my brain is a little confused."

"I do not wonder from the grievous assaults made upon it last night, Nicholas," observed Sir Ralph. "Perhaps you are not aware that your crowning act was whisking wildly round the room by yourself like a frantic dervish."

"I was dancing with Isole de Heton," said Nicholas.

"With whom?" inquired Dewhurst, in surprise.

"With a wicked votaress, who has been dead nearly a couple of centuries," interposed Sir Ralph; "and who, by her sinful life, merited the punishment she is said to have incurred. This delusion shows how dreadfully intoxicated you were, Nicholas. For the time you had quite lost your reason."

"I am sober enough now, at all events," rejoined Nicholas; "and I am convinced that Isole did dance with me, nor will any arguments reason me out of that belief."

"I am sorry to hear you say so, Nicholas," returned Sir Ralph. "That you were under the impression at the time I can easily understand, but that you should persist in such a senseless and wicked notion, is more than I can comprehend."

"I saw her with my own eyes as plainly as I see you, Sir Ralph," replied Nicholas, warmly, "that I declare upon my honour and conscience, and I also felt the pressure of her arms. Whether it may not have been the Fiend in her likeness I will not take upon me to declare, and indeed I have some misgivings on the subject, but that a beautiful creature, exactly resembling the votaress, danced with me, I will ever maintain."

"If so, she was invisible to others, for I beheld her not," said Sir Ralph, "and though I cannot yield credence to your explanation, yet granting it to be correct, I do not see how it mends your case."

"On the contrary, it only proves that Master Nicholas yielded to the snares of Satan," said Dewhurst, shaking his head. "I would recommend you long fasting and frequent prayer, my good Sir, and I shall prepare a lecture for your special edification, which I will propound to you on your return to Downham, and if it fails in effect, I will persevere with other godly discourses."

"With your aid, I trust to be set free, reverend Sir," returned Nicholas; "but as I have already passed two or three hours in prayer, I hope they may stand me in lieu of any present fasting, and induce you to omit the article of penance, or postpone it to some future occasion, when I may be better able to perform it, for I am just now particularly hungry, and am

always better able to resist temptation with a full stomach than an empty one. As I find it displeasing to Sir Ralph, I will not insist upon my visionary partner in the dance, at least, until I am better able to substantiate the fact; and I shall listen to your lectures, worthy Sir, with great delight, and, I doubt not, with equal benefit; but in the meantime, as carnal wants must be supplied, and mundane matters attended to, I propose, with our excellent host's permission, that we proceed to breakfast."

Sir Ralph made no answer, but ascended the steps, and was followed by Dewhurst, heaving a deep sigh, and turning up the whites of his eyes, and by Nicholas, who felt his bosom eased of half its load, and secretly congratulated himself upon getting out of the scrape so easily.

In the hall they found Richard Assheton habited in a riding-dress, booted, spurred, and in all respects prepared for the expedition. There were such evident traces of anxiety and suffering about him, that Sir Ralph questioned him as to the cause, and Richard replied that he had passed a most restless night. He did not add that he had been made acquainted by Adam Whitworth with the midnight visit of the two girls to the conventual church, because he was well aware Sir Ralph would be greatly displeased by the circumstance, and because Mistress Nutter had expressed a wish that it should be kept secret. Sir Ralph, however, saw there was more upon his young relative's mind than he chose to confess, but he did not urge any further admission into his confidence.

Meantime, the party had been increased by the arrival of Master Potts, who was likewise equipped for the ride. The hour was too early, it might be, for him, or he had not rested well like Richard, or had been troubled with bad dreams, but certainly he did not look very well, or in very good humour. He had slept at the Abbey, having been accommodated with

a bed after the sudden seizure which he attributed to the instrumentality of Mistress Nutter. The little attorney bowed obsequiously to Sir Ralph, who returned his salutation very stiffly, nor was he much better received by the rest of the company.

At a sign from Sir Ralph, his guests then knelt down, and a prayer was uttered by the divine — or rather a discourse, for it partook more of the latter character than the former. In the course of it he took occasion to paint in strong colours the terrible consequences of intemperance, and Nicholas was obliged to endure a well-merited lecture of half-an-hour's duration. But even Parson Dewhurst could not hold out for ever, and to the relief of all his hearers, he at length brought this discourse to a close.

Breakfast at this period was a much more substantial affair than a modern morning repast, and differed little from dinner or supper, except in respect to quantity. On the present occasion, there were carbonadoes of fish and fowl, a cold chine, a huge pasty, a capon, neats' tongues, sausages, botargos, and other matters as provocative of thirst as sufficing to the appetite. Nicholas set to work bravely. Broiled trout, steaks, and a huge slice of venison pasty, disappeared quickly before him, and he was not quite so sparing of the ale as seemed consistent with his previously-expressed resolutions of temperance. In vain Parson Dewhurst filled a goblet with water and looked significantly at him. He would not take the hint, and turned a deaf ear to the admonitory cough of Sir Ralph. He had little help from the others, for Richard ate sparingly, and Master Potts made a very poor figure beside him. At length, having cleared his plate, emptied his cup, and wiped his lips, the squire arose, and said he must bid adieu to his wife, and should then be ready to attend them.

While he quitted the hall for this purpose, Mistress Nutter entered it. She looked paler than ever, and her eyes seemed larger, darker, and brighter. Nicholas shuddered slightly as she approached, and even Potts felt a thrill of apprehension pass through his frame. He scarcely, indeed, ventured a look at her, for he dreaded her mysterious power, and feared she could fathom the designs he secretly entertained against her. But she took no notice whatever of him. Acknowledging Sir Ralph's salutation, she motioned Richard to follow her to the further end of the room.

"Your sister is very ill, Richard," she said, as the young man attended her, "feverish, and almost light-headed. Adam Whitworth has told you, I know, that she was imprudent enough, in company with Alizon, to visit the ruins of the conventual church late last night, and she there sustained some fright which has produced a great shock upon her system. When found, she was fainting, and though I have taken every care of her, she still continues much excited, and rambles strangely. You will be surprised as well as grieved when I tell you that she charges Alizon with having bewitched her."

"How, Madam!" cried Richard. "Alizon bewitch her. It is impossible."

"You are right, Richard," replied Mistress Nutter; "the thing is impossible; but the accusation will find easy credence among the superstitious household here, and may be highly prejudicial, if not fatal to poor Alizon. It is most unlucky she should have gone out in this way, for the circumstance cannot be explained, and in itself serves to throw suspicion upon her."

"I must see Dorothy before I go," said Richard; "perhaps I may be able to soothe her."

"It was for that end I came hither," replied Mistress Nutter; "but I thought it well you should be prepared. Now come with me."

Upon this they left the hall together, and proceeded to the abbot's chamber, where Dorothy was lodged. Richard was greatly shocked at the sight of his sister, so utterly changed was she from the blithe being of yesterday — then so full of health and happiness. Her cheeks burnt with fever, her eyes were unnaturally bright, and her fair hair hung about her face in disorder. She kept fast hold of Alizon, who stood beside her.

"Ah, Richard!" she cried, on seeing him, "I am glad you are come. You will persuade this girl to restore me to reason — to free me from the terrors that beset me. She can do so if she will."

"Calm yourself, dear sister," said Richard, gently endeavouring to free Alizon from her grasp.

"No, do not take her from me," said Dorothy, wildly; "I am better when she is near me — much better. My brow does not throb so violently, and my limbs are not twisted so painfully. Do you know what ails me, Richard?"

"You have caught cold from wandering out indiscreetly last night," said Richard.

"I am bewitched!" rejoined Dorothy, in tones that pierced her brother's brain — "bewitched by Alizon Device — by your love — ha! ha! She wishes to kill me, Richard, because she thinks I am in her way. But you will not let her do it."

"You are mistaken, dear Dorothy. She means you no harm," said Richard.

"Heaven knows how much I grieve for her, and how fondly I love her," exclaimed Alizon, tearfully.

"It is false!" cried Dorothy. "She will tell a different tale when you are gone. She is a witch, and you shall never marry her, Richard — never! — never!"

Mistress Nutter, who stood at a little distance, anxiously observing what was passing, waved her hand several times towards the sufferer, but without effect.

"I have no influence over her," she muttered. "She is really bewitched. I must find other means to quieten her."

Though both greatly distressed, Alizon and Richard redoubled their attentions to the poor sufferer. For a few moments she remained quiet, but with her eyes constantly fixed on Alizon, and then said quickly and fiercely, "I have been told, if you scratch one who has bewitched you till you draw blood you will be cured. I will plunge my nails in her flesh."

"I will not oppose you," replied Alizon, gently; "tear my flesh if you will. You should have my life's blood, if it would cure you; but if the success of the experiment depends on my having bewitched you it will assuredly fail."

"This is dreadful," interposed Richard. "Leave her, Alizon, I entreat of you. She will do you an injury."

"I care not," replied the young maid. "I will stay by her till she voluntarily releases me."

The almost tigress fury with which Dorothy had seized upon the unresisting girl here suddenly deserted her, and sobbing hysterically, she fell upon her neck. Oh, with what delight Alizon pressed her to her bosom!

"Dorothy, dear Dorothy!" she cried.

"Alizon, dear Alizon!" responded Dorothy. "Oh! how could I suspect you of any ill design against me!"

"She is no witch, dear sister, be assured of that!" said Richard.

"Oh, no — no — no, I am quite sure she is not," cried Dorothy, kissing her affectionately.

This change had been wrought by the low-breathed spells of Mistress Nutter.

"The access is over," she mentally ejaculated, "but I must get him away before the fit returns. You had better go now, Richard," she added aloud, and touching his arm, "I will answer for your sister's restoration. An opiate will produce sleep, and if possible, she shall return to Middleton today."

"If I go, Alizon must go with me," said Dorothy.

"Well, well, I will not thwart your desires," rejoined Mistress Nutter. And she made a sign to Richard to depart.

The young man pressed his sister's hand, bade a tender farewell to Alizon, and, infinitely relieved by the improvement which had taken place in the former, and which he firmly believed would speedily lead to her entire restoration, descended to the entrance-hall, where he found Sir Ralph and Parson Dewhurst, who told him that Nicholas and Potts were in the court-yard, and impatient to set out.

Shouts of laughter saluted the ears of the trio, as they descended the steps. The cause of the merriment was speedily explained when they looked towards the stables, and beheld Potts struggling for mastery with a stout Welsh pony, who showed every disposition, by plunging, kicking, and rearing, to remove him from his seat, though without success, for the attorney was not quite such a contemptible horseman as might be imagined. A wicked-looking little fellow was Flint, with a rough, rusty-black coat, a thick tail, that swept the ground, a mane to match, and an eye of mixed fire and cunning. When brought forth, he had allowed Potts to mount him quietly enough, but no sooner was the attorney comfortably in possession than he was served with a notice of ejectment. Down went Flint's head and up went his heels, while on the next instant he was rearing aloft, with his fore feet beating the air, so

nearly perpendicular, that the chances seemed in favour of his coming down on his back. Then he whirled suddenly round, shook himself violently, threatened to roll over, and performed antics of the most extraordinary kind, to the dismay of his rider, but to the infinite amusement of the spectators, who were ready to split their sides with laughter — indeed tears fairly streamed down the squire's cheeks. However, when Sir Ralph appeared it was thought desirable to put an end to the fun, and Peter, the groom, advanced to seize the restive little animal's bridle, but eluding the grasp, Flint started off at full gallop, and, accompanied by the two bloodhounds, careered round the court-yard, as if running in a ring. Vainly did poor Potts tug at the bridle. Flint, having the bit firmly between his teeth, defied his utmost efforts. Away he went with the hounds at his heels, as if, said Nicholas, "the devil were behind him." Though annoyed and angry, Sir Ralph could not help laughing at the ridiculous scene, and even a smile crossed Parson Dewhurst's grave countenance as Flint and his rider scampered madly past them. Sir Ralph called to the grooms, and attempts were instantly made to check the furious pony's career, but he baffled them all, swerving suddenly round when an endeavour was made to intercept him, leaping over any trifling obstacle, and occasionally charging any one who stood in his path. What with the grooms running hither and thither, vociferating and swearing, the barking and springing of the hounds, the yelping of lesser dogs, and the screaming of poultry; the whole yard was in a state of uproar and confusion.

"Flint mun be possessed," cried Peter. "Ey never seed him go on i' this way efore. Ey noticed Elizabeth Device near th' stables last neet, an ey shouldna wonder if hoo ha' bewitched him."

"Neaw doubt on't," replied another groom. "How-

somever we mun contrive to ketch him, or Sir Roaph win send us aw abowt our business."

"Ey wish yo'd contrive to do it, then, Tum Lomax," replied Peter, "fo' ey'm fairly blowd. Dang me, if ey ever seed sich hey-go-mad wark i' my born days. What's to be done, squoire?" he added to Nicholas.

"The devil only knows," replied the latter; "but it seems we must wait till the little rascal chooses to stop."

This occurred sooner than was expected. Thinking, possibly, that he had done enough to induce Master Potts to give up all idea of riding him, Flint suddenly slackened his pace, and trotted as if nothing had happened, to the stable-door; but if he had formed any such notion as the above, he was deceived, for the attorney, who was quite as obstinate and wilful as himself, and who through all his perils had managed to maintain his seat, was resolved not to abandon it, and positively refused to dismount when urged to do so by Nicholas and the grooms.

"He will go quietly enough now, I dare say," observed Potts, "and if not and you will lend me a hunting-whip I will undertake to cure him of his tricks."

Flint seemed to understand what was said, for he laid back his ears as if meditating more mischief, but being surrounded by the grooms, he deemed it advisable to postpone the attempt to a more convenient opportunity. In compliance with his request, a heavy hunting-whip was handed to Potts, and armed with this formidable weapon, the little attorney quite longed for an opportunity of effacing his disgrace. Meanwhile, Sir Ralph had come up and ordered a steady horse out for him; but Master Potts adhered to his resolution, and Flint remaining perfectly quiet, the baronet let him have his own way.

Soon after this, Nicholas and Richard having mounted their steeds, the party set forth. As they were passing through

the gateway, which had been thrown wide open by Ned Huddlestone, they were joined by Simon Sparshot, who had been engaged by Potts to attend him on the expedition in his capacity of constable. Simon was mounted on a mule, and brought word that Master Roger Nowell begged they would ride round by Read Hall, where he would be ready to accompany them, as he wished to be present at the perambulation of the boundaries. Assenting to the arrangement, the party set forth in that direction, Richard and Nicholas riding a little in advance of the others.

CHAPTER II.

Read Hall.

The road taken by the party on quitting Whalley led up the side of a hill, which, broken into picturesque inequalities, and partially clothed with trees, sloped down to the very brink of the Calder. Winding round the broad green plain, heretofore described, with the lovely knoll in the midst of it, and which formed with the woody hills encircling it, a perfect amphitheatre, the river was ever an object of beauty — sometimes lost beneath overhanging boughs or high banks, anon bursting forth where least expected, now rushing swiftly over its shallow and rocky bed, now subsiding into a smooth full current. The Abbey and the village were screened from view by the lower part of the hill which the horsemen were scaling, but the old bridge and a few cottages at the foot of Whalley Nab, with their thin blue smoke mounting into the pure morning air, gave life and interest to the picture. Hence, from base to summit, Whalley Nab stood revealed, and the verdant lawns opening out amidst the woods feathering its heights, were fully discernible. Placed by Nature as the guardian of this fair valley, the lofty eminence well became the post as-

signed to it. None of the belt of hills connected with it were so well wooded as their leader, nor so beautiful in form, while some of them were overtopped by the bleak fells of Longridge, rising at a distance behind them.

Nor were those exquisite contrasts wanting, which are only to be seen in full perfection when the day is freshest and the dew is still heavy on the grass. The near side of the hill was plunged in deep shade; thin, gauzy vapour hung on the stream beneath, while on the opposite heights, and where the great boulder stones were visible in the bed of the river, all was sparkling with sunshine. So enchanting was the prospect, that though perfectly familiar with it, the two foremost horsemen drew in the rein to contemplate it. High above them, on a sandbank, through which their giant roots protruded, shot up two tall silver-stemm'd beech-trees, forming with their newly opened foliage a canopy of tenderest green. Further on appeared a grove of oaks scarcely in leaf; and below were several fine sycamores, already green and umbrageous, intermingled with elms, ashes, and horse-chestnuts, and overshadowing brakes covered with maples, alders, and hazels. The other spaces among the trees were enlivened by patches of yellow-flowering and odorous gorse. Mixed with the warblings of innumerable feathered songsters were heard the cheering notes of the cuckoo; and the newly-arrived swallows were seen chasing the flies along the plain, or skimming over the surface of the river. Already had Richard's depression yielded to the exhilarating freshness of the morning, and the same kindly influence produced a more salutary effect on Nicholas than Parson Dewhurst's lecture had been able to accomplish. The worthy squire was a true lover of Nature; admiring her in all her forms, whether arrayed in pomp of wood and verdure, as in the lovely landscape before him, or dreary and desolate as in the heathy forest wastes they were

about to traverse. While breathing the fresh morning air, inhaling the fragrance of the wild flowers and listening to the warbling of the birds, he took a well-pleased survey of the scene, commencing with the bridge, passing over Whalley Nab and the mountainous circle conjoined with it, till his gaze settled on Morton Hall, a noble mansion finely situated on a shoulder of the hill beyond him, and commanding the entire valley.

"Were I not owner of Downham," he observed, to Richard, "I should wish to be master of Morton." And then pointing to the green area below he added, "What a capital spot for a race! There we might try the speed of our nags for the twenty pieces I talked of yesterday; and the judges of the match and those who chose to look on might station themselves on yon knoll, which seems made for the express purpose. Three years ago I remember a fair was held upon that plain, and the foot races, the wrestling matches, and the various sports and pastimes of the rustics, viewed from the knoll, formed the prettiest sight ever looked upon. But pleasant as the prospect is, we must not tarry here all day."

Before setting forward, he cast a glance towards Pendle Hill, which formed the most prominent object of view on the left, and lay like a leviathan basking in the sunshine. The vast mass rose up gradually until at its further extremity it attained an altitude of more than 1800 feet above the sea. At the present moment it was without a cloud, and the whole of its broad outline was distinctly visible.

"I love Pendle Hill," cried Nicholas, enthusiastically; "and from whatever side I view it — whether from this place, where I see it from end to end, from its lowest point to its highest; from Padiham, where it frowns upon me; from Clithero, where it smiles; or from Downham, where it rises in full majesty before me — from all points and under

all aspects, whether robed in mist or radiant with sunshine, I delight in it. Born beneath its giant shadow I look upon it with filial regard. Some folks say Pendle Hill wants grandeur and sublimity, but they themselves must be wanting in taste. Its broad, round, smooth mass is better than the roughest, craggiest, shaggiest, most sharply splintered mountain of them all. And then what a view it commands! — Lancaster with its gray old castle on one hand; York with its reverend minster on the other — the Irish Sea and its wild coast — fell, forest, moor, and valley, watered by the Ribble, the Hodder, the Calder and the Lime — rivers not to be matched for beauty. You recollect the old distich —

'Ingleborough, Pendle Hill, and Pennygent,
Are the highest hills between Scotland and Trent.'

This vouches for its height, but there are two other doggerel lines still more to the purpose —

'Pendle Hill, Pennygent, and Ingleborough,
Are three such hills as you 'll not find by seeking England thorough.'

With this opinion I quite agree. There is no hill in England like Pendle Hill."

"Every man to his taste, squire," observed Potts; "but, to my mind, Pendle Hill has no other recommendation than its size. I think it a great, brown, ugly, lumpy mass, without beauty of form or any striking character. I hate your bleak Lancashire hills, with heathy ranges on the top, fit only for the sustenance of a few poor half-starved sheep; and as to the view from them, it is little else than a continuous range of moors and dwarfed forests. Highgate Hill is quite mountain enough for me, and Hampstead Heath wild enough for any civilised purpose."

"A veritable son of Cockayne!" muttered Nicholas, contemptuously.

Riding on, and entering the grove of oaks he lost sight of his favourite hill, though glimpses were occasionally caught through the trees of the lovely valley below. Soon afterwards the party turned off on the left and presently arrived at a gate which admitted them to Read Park. Five minutes' canter over the springy turf then brought them to the house.

The manor of Reved or Read came into the possession of the Nowell family in the time of Edward III., and extended on one side, within a mile of Whalley, from which township it was divided by a deep woody ravine, taking its name from the little village of Sabden, and on the other stretched far into Pendle Forest. The hall was situated on an eminence forming part of the heights of Padiham, and faced a wide valley, watered by the Calder, and consisting chiefly of barren tracts of moor and forest land, bounded by the high hills near Accrington and Rossendale. On the left, some half-dozen miles off, lay Burnley, and the greater part of the land in this direction being uninclosed and thinly peopled, had a dark dreary look, that served to enhance the green beauty of the well-cultivated district on the right. Behind the mansion, thick woods extended to the very confines of Pendle Forest, of which, indeed, they originally formed part, and here, if the course of the stream, flowing through the gully of Sabden, were followed, every variety of brake, glen, and dingle, might be found. Read Hall was a large and commodious mansion, forming with a centre and two advancing wings three sides of a square, between which was a grassplot ornamented with a dial. The gardens were laid out in the taste of the time with trim alleys and parterres, terraces and steps, stone statues, and clipped yews.

The house was kept up well and consistently by its owner, who lived like a country gentleman with a good estate, entertained his friends hospitably, but without any parade,

and was never needlessly lavish in his expenditure, unless, perhaps, in the instance of the large ostentatious pew erected by him in the parish church of Whalley, and which, considering he had a private chapel at home, and maintained a domestic chaplain to do duty in it, seemed little required, and drew upon him the censure of the neighbouring gossips, who said there was more of pride than religion in his pew. With the chapel at the hall a curious history was afterwards connected. Converted into a dining-room by a descendant of Roger Nowell, the apartment was incautiously occupied by the planner of the alterations, before the plaster was thoroughly dried; in consequence of which he caught a severe cold, and died in the desecrated chamber, his fate being looked upon as a judgment.

With many good qualities Roger Nowell was little liked. His austere and sarcastic manner repelled his equals, and his harshness made him an object of dislike and dread among his inferiors. Besides being the terror of all evil doers, he was a hard man in his dealings, though he endeavoured to be just, and persuaded himself he was so. A year or two before, having been appointed sheriff of the county, he had discharged the important office with so much zeal and ability, as well as liberality, that he rose considerably in public estimation. It was during this period that Master Potts came under his notice at Lancaster, and the little attorney's shrewdness gained him an excellent client in the owner of Read. Roger Nowell was a widower, but his son, who resided with him, was married, and had a family, so that the hall was fully occupied.

Roger Nowell was turned sixty, but he was still in the full vigour of mind and body, his temperate and active habits keeping him healthy; he was of a spare muscular frame, somewhat bent in the shoulders, and had very sharp features,

keen gray eyes, a close mouth, and prominent chin. His hair was white as silver, but his eyebrows were still black and bushy.

Seeing the party approach, the lord of the mansion came forth to meet them, and begged them to dismount for a moment and refresh themselves. Richard excused himself, but Nicholas sprang from his saddle, and Potts, though somewhat more slowly, imitated his example. An open door admitted them to the entrance-hall, where a repast was spread, of which the host pressed his guests to partake, but Nicholas declined on the score of having just breakfasted; notwithstanding which he was easily prevailed upon to take a cup of ale. Leaving him to discuss it, Nowell led the attorney to a well-furnished library, where he usually transacted his magisterial business, and held a few minutes' private conference with him, after which they returned to Nicholas, and by this time the magistrate's own horse being brought round, the party mounted once more. The attorney regretted abandoning his seat, for Flint indulged him with another exhibition somewhat similar to the first, though of less duration, for a vigorous application of the hunting-whip brought the wrong-headed little animal to reason.

Elated by the victory he had obtained over Flint, and anticipating a successful issue to the expedition, Master Potts was in excellent spirits, and found a great deal to admire in the domain of his honoured and singular good client. Though not very genuine, his admiration was deservedly bestowed. The portion of the park they were now traversing was extremely diversified and beautiful, with long sweeping lawns studded with fine trees, among which were many ancient thorns, now in full bloom, and richly scenting the gale. Herds of deer were nipping the short grass, browsing the lower spray of the ashes, or couching amid the ferny hollows.

It was now that Nicholas, who had been all along anxious to try the speed of his horse, proposed to Richard a gallop towards a clump of trees about a mile off, and the young man assenting, away they started. Master Potts started too, for Flint did not like to be left behind, but the mettlesome pony was soon distanced. For some time the two horses kept so closely together, that it was difficult to say which would arrive at the goal first; but, by and by, Robin got a-head. Though at first indifferent to the issue of the race, the spirit of emulation soon seized upon Richard, and spurring Merlin, the noble animal sprang forward, and was once again by the side of his opponent.

For a quarter of a mile the ground had been tolerably level, and the sod firm; but they now approached a swamp, and in his eagerness Nicholas did not take sufficient precaution, and got involved in it before he was aware. Richard was more fortunate, having kept on the right, where the ground was hard. Seeing Nicholas struggling out of the marshy soil, he would have stayed for him, but the latter bade him go on, saying he would soon be up with him, and he made good his words. Shortly after this their course was intercepted by a brook, and both horses having cleared it excellently, they kept well together again for a short time, when they neared a deep dyke which lay between them and the clump of trees. On descrying it Richard pointed out a course to the left, but Nicholas held on, unheeding the caution. Fully expecting to see him break his neck, for the dyke was of formidable width, Richard watched him with apprehension, but the squire gave him a re-assuring nod, and went on. Neither horse nor man faltered, though failure would have been certain destruction to both. The wide trench now yawned before them — they were upon its edge, and without trusting himself to measure it with his eye,

Nicholas clapped spurs into Robin's sides. The brave horse sprang forward and landed him safely on the opposite bank. Hallooing cheerily, as soon as he could check his courser, the squire wheeled round, and rode back to look at the dyke he had crossed. Its width was terrific and fairly astounded him. Robin snorted loudly, as if proud of his achievement, and showed some disposition to return, but the squire was quite content with what he had done. The exploit afterwards became a theme of wonder throughout the country, and the spot was long afterwards pointed out as "Squire Nicholas's Leap;" but there was not another horseman found daring enough to repeat the experiment.

Richard had to make a considerable circuit to join his cousin, and while he was going round Nicholas looked out for the others. In the distance he could see Roger Nowell riding leisurely on, followed by Sparshot and a couple of grooms, who had come with their master from the hall, while midway, to his surprise, he perceived Flint galloping without a rider. A closer examination showed the squire what had happened. Like himself Master Potts had incautiously approached the swamp, and getting entangled in it was thrown, head foremost, into the slough; out of which he was now floundering, covered from head to foot with inky-coloured slime. As soon as they were aware of the accident the two grooms pushed forward, and one of them galloped after Flint, whom he succeeded at last in catching, while the other, with difficulty preserving his countenance at the woful plight of the attorney, who looked as black as a negre, pointed out a cottage in the hollow, which belonged to one of the keepers, and offered to conduct him thither. Potts gladly assented, and soon gained the little tenement, where he was being washed and rubbed down by a couple of stout wenches, when the rest of the party came up. It was impossible to help

laughing at him, but Potts took the merriment in good part, and to show he was not disheartened by the misadventure, as soon as circumstances would permit, he mounted the unlucky pony, and the cavalcade set forward again.

CHAPTER III.

The boggart's glen.

THE manor of Read, it has been said, was skirted by a deep woody ravine of three or four miles in length, extending from the little village of Sabden, in Pendle Forest, to within a short distance of Whalley; and through this gully flowed a stream, which taking its rise near Barley, at the foot of Pendle Hill, added its waters to those of the Calder, at a place called Cock Bridge. In summer, or in dry seasons, this stream proceeded quietly enough, and left the greater part of its stony bed unoccupied; but in winter, or after continuous rains, it assumed all the character of a mountain torrent, and swept every thing before it. A narrow bridle road led through the ravine to Sabden, and along it, after quitting the park, the cavalcade proceeded, headed by Nicholas.

The little river danced merrily past them, singing as it went, the sunshine sparkling on its bright clear waters, and glittering on the pebbles beneath them. Now the stream would chafe and foam against some larger impediment to its course; now it would dash down some rocky height and form a beautiful cascade; then it would hurry on for some time with little interruption, till stayed by a projecting bank it would form a small deep basin, where, beneath the far-cast shadow of an overhanging oak, or under its huge twisted and denuded roots, the angler might be sure of finding the speckled trout, the dainty greyling, or their mutual enemy, the voracious jack. The ravine was well wooded throughout, and

in many parts singularly beautiful, from the disposition of the timber on its banks, as well as from the varied form and character of the trees. Here might be seen an acclivity covered with waving birch, or a top crowned with a mountain ash — there on a smooth expanse of green sward stood a range of noble elms, whose mighty arms stretched completely across the ravine. Further on, there were chestnuts and walnut trees, willows, with hoary stems and silver leaves, almost encroaching upon the stream, larches upon the heights, and here and there, upon some sandy eminence, a spreading beach-tree. For the most part the bottom of the glen was overgrown with brushwood, and where its sides were too abrupt to admit the growth of larger trees, they were matted with woodbine and brambles. Out of these would sometimes start a sharp pinnacle, or fantastically-formed crag, adding greatly to the picturesque beauty of the scene. On such points were not unfrequently found perched a hawk, a falcon, or some large bird of prey, for the gully, with its brakes and thickets, was a favourite haunt of the feathered tribe. The hollies, of which there were plenty, with their green prickly leaves, and scarlet berries, afforded shelter and support to the blackbird; the thorns were frequented by the thrush; and numberless lesser songsters filled every other tree. In the covert there were pheasants and partridges in abundance, and snipe and wildfowl resorted to the river in winter. Thither, also, at all seasons, repaired the stately heron, to devour the finny race; and thither came, on like errand, the splendidly-plumed kingfisher. The magpie chattered, the jay screamed, and flew deeper into the woods as the horsemen approached, and the shy bittern hid herself amid the rushes. Occasionally, too, was heard the deep ominous croaking of a raven.

Hitherto, the glen had been remarkable for its softness and beauty, but it now began to assume a savage and sombre cha-

racter. The banks drew closer together, and became rugged and precipitous; while the trees met overhead, and, intermingling their branches, formed a canopy impervious to the sun's rays. The stream was likewise contracted in its bed, and its current, which, owing to the gloom, looked black as ink, flowed swiftly on, as if anxious to escape to livelier scenes. A large raven, which had attended the horsemen all the way, now alighted near them, and croacked ominously.

This part of the glen was in very ill repute, and was never traversed, even at noon-day, without apprehension. Its wild and savage aspect, its horrent precipices, its shaggy woods, its strangely-shaped rocks and tenebrous depths, where every imperfectly-seen object appeared doubly frightful — all combined to invest it with mystery and terror. No one willingly lingered here, but hurried on, afraid of the sound of his own footsteps. No one dared to gaze at the rocks lest he should see some hideous hobgoblin peering out of their fissures. No one glanced at the water for fear some terrible kelpy, with twining snakes for hair and scaly hide, should issue from it and drag him down to devour him with his shark-like teeth. Among the common folk this part of the ravine was known as "the boggart's glen," and was supposed to be haunted by mischievous beings who made the unfortunate wanderer their sport.

For the last half-mile the road had been so narrow and intricate in its windings, that the party were obliged to proceed singly; but this did not prevent conversation, and Nicholas, throwing the bridle over Robin's neck, left the sure-footed animal to pursue his course unguided, while he himself leaning back, chatted with Roger Nowell. At the entrance of the gloomy gorge above described Robin came to a stand, and refusing to move at a jerk from his master, the latter raised himself, and looked forward to see what could be the cause of

the stoppage. No impediment was visible, but the animal obstinately refused to go on, though urged both by word and spur. This stoppage necessarily delayed the rest of the cavalcade.

Well aware of the ill reputation of the place, when Simon Sparshot and the grooms found that Robin would not go on, they declared he must see the boggart, and urged the squire to turn back, or some mischief would befal him. But Nicholas, though not without misgivings, did not like to yield thus, especially when urged on by Roger Nowell. Indeed, the party could not get out of the ravine without going back nearly a mile, while Sabden was only half that distance from them. What was to be done? Robin still continued obstinate, and for the first time paid no attention to his master's commands. The poor animal was evidently a prey to violent terror, and snorted and reared, while his limbs were bathed in cold sweat.

Dismounting, and leaving him in charge of Roger Nowell, Nicholas walked on by himself to see if he could discover any cause for the horse's alarm, and he had not advanced far, when his eye rested upon a blasted oak forming a conspicuous object on a crag before him, on a scathed branch of which sat the raven.

Croak! croak! croak!

"Accursed bird, it is thou who hast frightened my horse," cried Nicholas. "Would I had a cross-bow or an arquebuss to stop thy croaking."

And as he picked up a stone to cast at the raven, a crashing noise was heard among the bushes high up on the rock, and the next moment a huge fragment dislodged from the cliff rolled down, and would have crushed him, if he had not nimbly avoided it.

Croak! croak! croak!

Nicholas almost fancied hoarse laughter was mingled with the cries of the bird.

The raven nodded its head, and expanded its wings, and the squire, whose recent experience had prepared him for any wonder, fully expected to hear it speak, but it only croaked loudly and exultingly, or if it laughed, the sound was like the creaking of rusty hinges.

Nicholas did not like it at all, and he resolved to go back, but ere he could do so, he was startled by a buffet on the ear, and turning angrily round to see who had dealt it, he could distinguish no one, but at the same moment received a second buffet on the other ear.

The raven croaked merrily.

"Would I could wring thy neck, accursed bird!" cried the enraged squire.

Scarcely was the vindictive wish uttered than a shower of blows fell upon him, and kicks from unseen feet were applied to his person.

All the while the raven croaked merrily, and flapped his big black wings.

Infuriated by the attack, the squire hit right and left manfully, and dashed out his feet in every direction, but his blows and kicks only met the empty air, while those of his unseen antagonist told upon his own person with increased effect.

The spectacle seemed to afford infinite amusement to the raven. The mischievous bird almost crowed with glee.

There was no standing it any longer. So amid a perfect hurricane of blows and kicks, and with the infernal voice of the raven ringing in his ears, the squire took to his heels. On reaching his companions he found they had not fared much better than himself. The two grooms were belabouring each other lustily; and Master Potts was exercising his hunting-whip on the broad shoulders of Sparshot, who in return was

making him acquainted with the taste of a stout ash plant. Assailed in the same manner as the squire, and naturally attributing the attack to their nearest neighbours, they waited for no explanation, but fell upon each other. Richard Assheton and Roger Nowell endeavoured to interfere and separate the combatants, and in doing so received some hard knocks for their pains; but all their pacific efforts were fruitless, until the squire appeared, and telling them they were merely the sport of hobgoblins, they desisted, but still the blows fell heavily on them as before, proving the truth of Nicholas's assertion.

Meanwhile, the squire had mounted Robin, and, finding the horse no longer exhibit the same reluctance to proceed, he dashed at full speed through the haunted glen; but even above the clatter of hoofs, and the noise of the party galloping after him, he could hear the hoarse exulting croaking of the raven.

As the gully expanded, and the sun once more found its way through the trees, and shone upon the river, Nicholas began to breathe more freely; but it was not until fairly out of the wood that he relaxed his speed. Not caring to enter into any explanation of the occurrence, he rode a little apart, to avoid conversation, and, as the others, who were still smarting from the blows they had received, were in no very good humour, a sullen silence prevailed throughout the party, as they mounted the bare hill side in the direction of the few scattered huts constituting the village of Sabden.

A blight seemed to have fallen upon the place. Roger Nowell, who had visited it a few months ago, could scarcely believe his eyes, so changed was its appearance. His inquiries as to the cause of its altered condition were everywhere met by the same answer — the poor people were all bewitched. Here a child was ill of a strange sickness, tossed

and tumbled in its bed, and contorted its limbs so violently, that its parents could scarcely hold it down. Another family was afflicted in a different manner, two of its number pining away and losing strength daily, as if a prey to some consuming disease. In a third, another child was sick, and vomited pins, nails, and other extraordinary substances. A fourth household was tormented by an imp in the form of a monkey, who came at night and pinched them all black and blue, spilt the milk, broke the dishes and platters, got under the bed, and raising it to the roof, let it fall with a terrible crash; putting them all in mental terror. In the next cottage there was no end to calamities, though they took a more absurd form. Sometimes the fire would not burn, or when it did it emitted no heat, so that the pot would not boil, nor the meat roast. Then the oat cakes would stick to the bake-stone, and no force could get them away from it till they were burnt and spoiled; the milk turned sour, the cheese became so hard that not even rats' teeth could gnaw it, the stools and settles broke down if sat upon, and the list of petty grievances was completed by a whole side of bacon being devoured in a single night. Roger Nowell and Nicholas listened patiently to a detail of all these grievances, and expressed strong sympathy for the sufferers, promising assistance and redress if possible. All the complainants taxed either Mother Demdike or Mother Chattox with afflicting them, and said they had incurred the anger of the two malevolent old witches by refusing to supply them with poultry, eggs, milk, butter, or other articles, which they had demanded. Master Potts made ample notes of the strange relations, and took down the name of every cottager.

At length, they arrived at the last cottage, and here a man, with a very doleful countenance, besought them to stop and listen to his tale.

"What is the matter, friend?" demanded Roger Nowell, halting, with the others. "Are you bewitched like your neighbours?"

"Troth am ey, your warship," replied the man, "an ey hope yo may be able to deliver me. Yo mun knoa, that somehow ey wor unlucky enough last Yule to offend Mother Chattox, an ever sin then aw's gone wrang wi' me. Th' good wife con never may butter come without stickin' a red-hot poker into t' churn; and last week, when our brindlt sow farrowed, and had fifteen to t' litter, an' fine uns os ever yo seed, seign on um deed. Sad wark! sad wark, mesters. The week efore that t' keaw deed; an th' week efore her th' owd mare, so that aw my stock be gone. Waes me! waes me! Nowt prospers wi' me. My poor dame is besoide hersel, an' th' chilter seems possessed. Ey ha' tried every remedy, boh without success. Ey ha' followed th' owd witch whoam, plucked a hontle o' thatch fro' her roof, sprinklet it wi' sawt anweter, burnt it an buried th' ess at th' change o' t' moon. No use, mesters. Then again, ey ha' getten a horse-shoe, heated it red hot, quenched it i" brine, an' nailed it to t' threshold wi' three nails, heel uppard. No more use nor t'other. Then ey ha' taen sawt weter, and put it in a bottle wi' three rusty nails, needles, and pins, boh ey hanna found that the witch ha' suffered thereby. An, lastly, ey ha' let myself blood, when the moon wur at full, an in opposition to th' owd hag's planet, an minglin' it wi' sawt, ha' burnt it i' a trivet, in hopes of afflictin' her; boh without avail, fo' ey seed her two days ago, an she flouted me an scoffed at me. What mun ey do, good mesters? What mun ey do?"

"Have you offended any one besides Mother Chattox, my poor fellow?" said Nowell.

"Mother Demdike, may be, your warship," replied the man.

"You suspect Mother Demdike and Mother Chattox of bewitching you," said Potts, taking out his memorandum-book, and making a note in it. "Your name, good fellow?"

"Oamfrey o' Will's o' Ben's o' Tummas' o' Sabden," replied the man.

"Is that all?" asked Potts.

"What more would you have?" said Richard. "The description is sufficiently particular."

"Scarcely precise enough," returned Potts. "However, it may do. We will help you in the matter, good Humphrey Etcera. You shall not be troubled with these pestilent witches much longer. The neighbourhood shall be cleared of them."

"Ey'm reet glad to hear, mester," replied the man.

"You promise much, Master Potts," observed Richard.

"Not a jot more than I am able to perform," replied the attorney.

"That remains to be seen," said Richard. "If these old women are as powerful as represented, they will not be so readily defeated."

"There you are in error, Master Richard," replied Potts. "The devil, whose vassals they are, will deliver them into our hands."

"Granting what you say to be correct, the devil must have little regard for his servants if he abandons them so easily," observed Richard, drily.

"What else can you expect from him?" cried Potts. "It is his custom to ensnare his victims, and then leave them to their fate."

"You are rather describing the course pursued by certain members of your own profession, Master Potts," said Richard. "The devil behaves with greater fairness to his clients."

"You are not going to defend him, I hope, Sir?" said the attorney.

"No; I only desire to give him his due," returned Richard.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Nicholas. "You had better have done, Master Potts; you will never get the better in the argument. But we must be moving, or we shall not get our business done before nightfall. As to you, Numps," he added, to the poor man, "we will not forget you. If any thing can be done for your relief, rely upon it, it shall not be neglected."

"Ay, ay," said Nowell, "the matter shall be looked into — and speedily."

"And the witches brought to justice," said Potts; "comfort yourself with that, good Humphrey Etcera."

"Ay, comfort yourself with that," observed Nicholas.

Soon after this they entered a wide dreary waste forming the bottom of the valley, lying between the heights of Padiham and Pendle Hill, and while wending their way across it, they heard a shout from the hill side, and presently afterwards perceived a man mounted on a powerful black horse, galloping swiftly towards them. The party awaited his approach, and the stranger speedily came up. He was a small man habited in a suit of rusty black, and bore a most extraordinary and marked resemblance to Master Potts. He had the same perky features, the same parchment complexion, the same yellow forehead as the little attorney. So surprising was the likeness, that Nicholas unconsciously looked round for Potts, and beheld him staring at the new-comer in angry wonder.

CHAPTER IV.

The reeve of the forest.

THE surprise of the party was by no means diminished when the stranger spoke. His voice exactly resembled the sharp cracked tones of the attorney.

"I crave pardon for the freedom I have taken in stopping you, good masters," he said, doffing his cap, and saluting them respectfully; "but being aware of your errand, I am come to attend you on it."

"And who are you, fellow, who thus volunteer your services?" demanded Roger Nowell, sharply.

"I am one of the reeves of the forest of Blackburnshire, worshipful Sir," replied the stranger, "and as such my presence at the intended perambulation of the boundaries of her property has been deemed necessary by Mistress Nutter, as I shall have to make a representation of the matter at the next court of swainmote."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Nowell, "but how knew you we were coming?"

"Mistress Nutter sent me word last night," replied the reeve, "that Master Nicholas Assheton and certain other gentlemen, would come to Rough Lee for the purpose of ascertaining the marks, meres, and boundaries of her property, early this morning, and desired my attendance on the occasion. Accordingly I stationed myself on yon high ground to look out for you, and have been on the watch for more than an hour."

"Humph!" exclaimed Roger Nowell, "and you live in the forest?"

"I live at Barrowford, worshipful Sir," replied the reeve, "but I have only lately come there, having succeeded Maurice

Mottisfont, the other reeve, who has been removed by the master forester to Rossendale, where I formerly dwelt."

"That may account for my not having seen you before," rejoined Nowell. "You are well mounted, sirrah. I did not know the master forester allowed his men such horses as the one you ride."

"This horse does not belong to me, Sir," replied the reeve, "it has been lent me by Mistress Nutter."

"Aha! I see how it is now," cried Nowell; "you are suborned to give false testimony, knave. I object to his attendance, Master Nicholas."

"Nay, I think you do the man injustice," said the squire. "He speaks frankly and fairly enough, and seems to know his business. The worst that can be said against him is, that he resembles somewhat too closely our little legal friend there. That, however, ought to be no objection to you, Master Nowell, but rather the contrary."

"Well, take the responsibility of the matter upon your own shoulders," said Nowell; "if any ill comes of it I shall blame you."

"Be it so," replied the squire, "my shoulders are broad enough to bear the burthen. You may ride with us, master reeve."

"May I inquire your name, friend?" said Potts, as the stranger fell back to the rear of the party.

"Thomas Potts, at your service, Sir," replied the reeve.

"What! — Thomas Potts!" exclaimed the astonished attorney.

"That is my name, Sir," replied the reeve, quietly.

"Why, zounds!" exclaimed Nicholas, who overheard the reply, "you do not mean to say your name is Thomas Potts? This is more wonderful still. You must be this gentleman's twin brother."

"The gentleman certainly seems to resemble me very strongly," replied the reeve, apparently surprised in his turn. "Is he of these parts?"

"No, I am not," returned Potts, angrily, "I am from London, where I reside in Chancery-lane, and practise the law, though I likewise attend as clerk of the court at the assizes at Lancaster, where I may possibly, one of these days, have the pleasure of seeing you, my pretended namesake."

"Possibly, Sir," said the reeve, with provoking calmness. "I myself am from Chester, and like yourself was brought up to the law, but I abandoned my profession, or rather it abandoned me, for I had few clients; so I took to an honester calling, and became a forester as you see. My father was a draper in the city I have mentioned, and dwelt in Watergate-street — his name was Peter Potts."

"Peter Potts your father!" exclaimed the attorney, in the last state of astonishment — "why he was mine! But I am his only son."

"Up to this moment I conceived myself an only son," said the reeve; "but it seems I was mistaken, since I find I have an elder brother."

"Elder brother!" exclaimed Potts, wrathfully. "You are older than I am by twenty years. But it is all a fabrication. I deny the relationship entirely."

"You cannot make me other than the son of my father," said the reeve, with a smile.

"Well, Master Potts," interposed Nicholas, laughing, "I see no reason why you should be ashamed of your brother. There is a strong family likeness between you. So old Peter Potts, the draper of Chester, was your father, eh? I was not aware of the circumstance before — ha, ha!"

"And but for this intrusive fellow, you would never have

become aware of it," muttered the attorney. "Give ear to me, squire," he said, urging Flint close up to the other's side, and speaking in a low tone, "I do not like the fellow's looks at all."

"I am surprised at that," rejoined the squire, "for he exactly resembles you."

"That is why I do not like him," said Potts. "I believe him to be a wizard."

"You are no wizard to think so," rejoined the squire. And he rode on to join Roger Nowell, who was a little in advance.

"I will try him on the subject of witchcraft," thought Potts. "As you dwell in the forest," he said to the reeve, "you have no doubt seen those two terrible beings, Mothers Demdike and Chattox?"

"Frequently," replied the reeve, "but I would rather not talk about them in their own territories. You may judge of their power by the appearance of the village you have just quitted. The inhabitants of that unlucky place refused them their customary tributes, and have therefore incurred their resentment. You will meet other instances of the like kind before you have gone far."

"I am glad of it, for I want to collect as many cases as I can of witchcraft," observed Potts.

"They will be of little use to you," observed the reeve.

"How so?" inquired Potts.

"Because if the witches discover what you are about, as they will not fail to do, you will never leave the forest alive," returned the other.

"You think not?" cried Potts.

"I am sure of it," replied the reeve.

"I will not be deterred from the performance of my duty," said Potts. "I defy the devil and all his works."

"You may have reason to repent your temerity," replied the reeve.

And, anxious apparently to avoid further conversation on the subject, he drew in the rein for a moment, and allowed the attorney to pass on.

Notwithstanding his boasting, Master Potts was not without much secret misgiving, but his constitutional obstinacy made him determine to prosecute his plans at any risk, and he comforted himself by recalling the opinion of his sovereign authority on such matters.

"Let me ponder over the exact words of our British Solomon," he thought. "I have his learned treatise by heart, and it is fortunate my memory serves me so well, for the sagacious prince's dictum will fortify me in my resolution, which has been somewhat shaken by this fellow, whom I believe to be no better than he should be, for all he calls himself my father's son, and hath assumed my likeness, doubtless for some mischievous purpose. 'If the magistrate,' saith the King, 'be slothful towards witches, God is very able to make them instruments to waken and punish his sloth.' No one can accuse me of slothfulness and want of zeal. My best exertions have been used against the accursed creatures. And now for the rest. 'But if, on the contrary, he be diligent in examining and punishing them, God will not permit their master to trouble or hinder so good a work!' Exactly what I have done. I am quite easy now, and shall go on fearlessly as before. I am one of the 'lawful lieutenants' described by the King, and cannot be 'defrauded or deprived' of my office."

As these thoughts passed through the attorney's mind a low derisive laugh sounded in his ears, and connecting it with the reeve, he looked back and found the object of his *sus*picions gazing at him, and chuckling maliciously. So

fiendishly malignant, indeed, was the gaze fixed upon him, that Potts was glad to turn his head away to avoid it.

"I am confirmed in my suspicions," he thought; "he is evidently a wizard, if he be not —"

Again the mocking laugh sounded in his ears, but he did not venture to look round this time, being fearful of once more encountering the terrible gaze.

Meanwhile, the party had traversed the valley, and to avoid a dangerous morass stretching across its lower extremity, and shorten the distance — for the ordinary road would have led them too much to the right — they began to climb one of the ridges of Pendle Hill, which lay between them and the vale they wished to gain. On obtaining the top of this eminence, an extensive view on either side opened upon them. Behind was the sterile valley they had just crossed, its black soil, hoary grass, and heathy wastes, only enlivened at one end by patches of bright sulphur-coloured moss, which masked a treacherous quagmire lurking beneath it. Some of the cottages in Sabden were visible, and from the sad circumstances connected with them, and which oppressed the thoughts of the beholders, added to the dreary character of the prospect. The day, too, had lost its previous splendour, and there were clouds overhead which cast deep shadows on the ground. But on the crest of Pendle Hill, which rose above them, a sun-burst fell, and attracted attention from its brilliant contrast to the prevailing gloom. Before them lay a deep gully, the sinuosities of which could be traced from the elevated position where they stood, though its termination was hidden by other projecting ridges. Further on, the sides of the mountain were bare and rugged, and covered with shelving stone. Beyond the defile before-mentioned, and over the last mountain ridge, lay a wide valley, bounded on the further side by the hills overlooking Colne, and the

mountain defile, now laid open to the travellers, exhibiting in the midst of the dark heathy ranges, which were its distinguishing features, some marks of cultivation. In parts it was inclosed and divided into paddocks by stone walls, and here and there a few cottages were collected together, dignified, as in the case of Sabden, by the name of a village. Amongst these were the Heyhouses, an assemblage of small stone tenements, the earliest that arose in the forest; Goldshaw Booth, now a populous place, and even then the largest hamlet in the district; and in the distance Ogden and Barley, the two latter scarcely comprising a dozen habitations, and those little better than huts. In some sheltered nook on the hill side might be discerned the solitary cottage of a cowherd, and not far from it the certain accompaniment of a sheepfold. Throughout this weird region, thinly peopled it is true, but still of great extent, and apparently abandoned to the powers of darkness, only one edifice could be found where its inhabitants could meet to pray, and this was an ancient chapel at Goldshaw Booth, originally erected in the reign of Henry III., though subsequently in part rebuilt in 1544, and which, with its low gray tower peeping from out the trees, was just discernible. Two halls were in view; one of which, Sabden, was of considerable antiquity, and gave its name to the village; and the other was Hoarstones, a much more recently erected mansion, strikingly situated on an acclivity of Pendle Hill. In general the upper parts of this mountain monarch of the waste were bare and heathy, while the heights overhanging Ogden and Barley were rocky, shelving, and precipitous, but the lower ridges were well covered with wood, and a thicket, once forming part of the ancient forest, ran far out into the plain near Goldshaw Booth. Numerous springs burst from the mountain side, and these, collecting their forces, formed a considerable

stream, which, under the name of Pendle Water, flowed through the valley above described, and after many picturesque windings, entered the rugged glen in which Rough Lee was situated, and swept past the foot of Mistress Nutter's residence.

Descending the hill, and passing through the thicket, the party came within a short distance of Goldshaw Booth, when they were met by a cowherd, who, with looks of great alarm, told them that John Law, the pedlar, had fallen down in a fit in the clough, and would perish if they did not stay to help him. As the poor man in question was well known both to Nicholas and Roger Nowell, they immediately agreed to go to his assistance, and accompanied the cowherd along a bye-road which led through the clough to the village. They had not gone far when they heard loud groans, and presently afterwards found the unfortunate pedlar lying on his back, and writhing in agony. He was a large, powerfully-built man, of middle age, and had been in the full enjoyment of health and vigour, so that his sudden prostration was the more terrible. His face was greatly disfigured, the mouth and neck drawn awry, the left eye pulled down, and the whole power of the same side gone.

"Why, John, this is a bad business," cried Nicholas, "you have had a paralytic stroke, I fear."

"Nah — nah — squoire," replied the sufferer, speaking with difficulty, "it 's neaw nat'ral ailment — its witchcraft."

"Witchcraft!" exclaimed Potts, who had come up, and producing his memorandum-book. "Another case. Your name and description, friend?"

"John Law, o' Cown, pedlar," replied the man.

"John Law, of Colne, I suppose, petty chapman," said Potts, making an entry. "Now, John, my good man, be pleased to tell us by whom you have been bewitched?"

"By Mother Demdike," groaned the man.

"Mother Demdike, ah?" exclaimed Potts, "good! very good. Now, John, as to the cause of your quarrel with the old hag?"

"Ey con scarcely rekillect it, my head be so confused, mester," replied the pedlar.

"Make an effort, John," persisted Potts, "it is most desirable such a dreadful offender should not escape justice."

"Weel, weel, ey'n try an tell it then," replied the pedlar. "Yo mun knoa ey wur crossing the hill fro' Cown to Rough Lee, wi' my pack upon my shouthers, when who should ey meet boh Mother Demdike, an hoo axt me to gi' her some scithers an pins, boh, os ill luck wad ha' it, ey refused. 'Yo had better do it, John,' hoo said, 'or yo'll rue it efore to-morrow neet.' Ey laughed at her, an trudged on, boh when I looked back, an seed her shakin' her skinny hond at me, ey repented and thowt ey would go back, an gi' her the choice o' my wares. Boh my pride wur too strong, an ey walked on to Barley an Ogden, an slept at Bess's o' th' booth, an woke this mornin' stout and strong, fully persuaded th' owd witch's threat would come to nowt. Alack a day! ey wur out i' my reckonin', fo' scarcely had ey reached this kloof, o' my way to Sabden, than ey wur seized wi' a sudden shock, os if a thunder-bowt had hit me, an ey lost the use o' my lower limbs, an t' laft soide, an should ha' deed most likely, if it hadna bin fo' Ebil o' Jem's o' Dan's, who spied me out, an brought me help."

"Yours is a deplorable case indeed, John," said Richard — "especially if it be the result of witchcraft."

"You do not surely doubt that it is so, Master Richard?" cried Potts.

"I offer no opinion," replied the young man; "but a paralytic stroke would produce the same effect. But instead

of discussing the matter, the best thing we can do will be to transport the poor man to Bess's o' th' booth, where he can be attended to."

"Tom and I can carry him there, if Abel will take charge of his pack," said one of the grooms.

"That I win," replied the cowherd, unstrapping the box, upon which the sufferer's head rested, and placing it on his own shoulders.

Meanwhile, a gate having been taken from its hinges, by Sparshot and the reeve, the poor pedlar, who groaned deeply during the operation, was placed upon it by the men, and borne towards the village, followed by the others, leading their horses.

Great consternation was occasioned in Goldshaw Booth by the entrance of the cavalcade, and still more, when it became known that John Law, the pedlar, who was a favourite with all, had had a frightful seizure. Old and young flocked forth to see him, and the former shook their heads, while the latter were appalled at the hideous sight. Master Potts took care to tell them that the poor fellow was bewitched by mother Demdike, but the information failed to produce the effect he anticipated, and served rather to repress than heighten their sympathy for the sufferer. The attorney concluded, and justly, that they were afraid of incurring the displeasure of the vindictive old hag by an open expression of interest in his fate. So strongly did this feeling operate, that after bestowing a glance of commiseration at the pedlar, most of them returned, without a word, to their dwellings.

On their way to the little hostel whither they were conveying the poor pedlar, the party passed the church, and the sexton, who was digging a grave in the yard, came forward to look at them, but on seeing John Law he seemed to understand what had happened, and resumed his employment.

A wide-spreading yew tree grew in this part of the churchyard, and near it stood a small cross rudely carved in granite, marking the spot where in the reign of Henry VI. Ralph Cliderhow, tenth abbot of Whalley, held a meeting of the tenantry, to check encroachments. Not far from this ancient cross the sexton, a hale old man, with a fresh complexion and silvery hair, was at work, and while the others went on, Master Potts paused to say a word to him.

"You have a funeral here to-day, I suppose, Master Sexton?" he said.

"Yeigh," replied the man, gruffly.

"One of the villagers?" inquired the attorney.

"Neaw; hoo were na o' Goldshey," replied the sexton.

"Where then — who was it?" persevered Potts.

The sexton seemed disinclined to answer; but at length said, "Meary Baldwyn, the miller's dowter, o' Rough Lee, os pretty a lass os ever yo see, mester. Hoo wur the apple o' her feayther's ee, an he hasna had a dry ee sin hoo deed. Wall-a-dey! we mun aw go, owd an young — owd an young — an pretty Meary Baldwyn went young enough. Poor lass! poor lass!" and he brushed the dew from his eyes with his brawny hand.

"Was her death sudden?" asked Potts.

"Neaw, not so sudden, mester," replied the sexton. "Ruchot Baldwyn had fair warnin'. Six months ago Meary wur ta'en ill, an fro' t' furst he knoad how it wad eend."

"How so, friend?" asked Potts, whose curiosity began to be aroused.

"Becose —" replied the sexton, and he stopped suddenly short.

"She was bewitched?" suggested Potts.

The sexton nodded his head, and began to ply his mattock vigorously.

"By Mother Demdike?" inquired Potts, taking out his memorandum book.

The sexton again nodded his head, but spake no word, and, meeting some obstruction in the ground, took up his pick to remove it.

"Another case!" muttered Potts, making an entry. "Mary Baldwyn, daughter of Richard Baldwyn, of Rough Lee, aged — How old was she, sexton?"

"Throtteen," replied the man; "boh dunna ax me ony more questions, mester. Th' berrin takes place i' an hour, an ey hanna half digg'd th' grave."

"Your own name, Master Sexton, and I have done?" said Potts.

"Zachariah Worms," answered the man.

"Worms — ha! an excellent name for a sexton," cried Potts. "You provide food for your family, eh, Zachariah?"

"Tut — tut," rejoined the sexton, testily, "go an' moind yer own bus'ness, mon, an' leave me to moind mine."

"Very well, Zachariah," replied Potts. And having obtained all he required, he proceeded to the little hostel, where, finding the rest of the party had dismounted, he consigned Flint to a cowherd, and entered the house.

CHAPTER V.

Bess's o' th' Booth.

BESS'S O' TH' BOOTH — for so the little hostel at Goldshaw was called, after its mistress Bess Whitaker — was far more comfortable and commodious than its unpretending exterior seemed to warrant. Stouter and brighter ale was not to be drunk in Lancashire than Bess brewed; nor was better sherris or clary to be found, go where you would, than in her cellars. The traveller crossing those dreary wastes, and riding from Burnley to Clithero, or from Colne to Whalley, as the case might be, might well halt at Bess's, and be sure of a roast fowl for dinner, with the addition, perhaps, of some trout from Pendle Water, or if the season permitted, a heath-cock or a pheasant; or if he tarried there for the night, he was equally sure of a good supper and fair linen. It has already been mentioned, that at this period it was the custom of all classes in the northern counties, men and women, to resort to the ale-houses to drink, and the hostel at Goldshaw was the general rendezvous of the neighbourhood. For those who could afford it, Bess would brew incomparable sack; but if a guest called for wine, and she liked not his looks, she would flatly tell him her ale was good enough for him, and if it pleased him not he should have nothing. Submission always followed in such cases, for there was no disputing with Bess. Neither would she permit the frequenters of the hostel to sit later than she chose, and would clear the house in a way equally characteristic and effectual. At a certain hour, and that by no means a late one, she would take down a large horsewhip, which hung on a convenient peg in the principal room, and after bluntly ordering her guests to go home, if any resistance were offered, she would lay the whip across their

shoulders, and forcibly eject them from the premises; but, as her determined character was well known, this violence was seldom necessary. In strength Bess was a match for any man, and assistance from her cowherds — for she was a farmer as well as hostess — was at hand if required. As will be surmised from the above, Bess was large and masculine-looking, but well-proportioned nevertheless, and possessed a certain coarse kind of beauty, which in earlier years had inflamed Richard Baldwyn, the miller of Rough Lee, who made overtures of marriage to her. These were favourably entertained, but a slight quarrel occurring between them, the lover, in her own phrase, got "his jacket soundly dusted" by her, and declared off, taking to wife a more docile and light-handed maiden. As to Bess, though she had given this unmistakeable proof of her ability to manage a husband, she did not receive a second offer, nor, as she had now attained the mature age of forty, did it seem likely she would ever receive one.

Bess's o' th' Booth was an extremely clean and comfortable house. The floor, it is true, was of hard clay, and the windows little more than narrow slits, with heavy stone frames, further darkened by minute diamond panes, but the benches were scrupulously clean, and so was the long oak table in the centre of the principal and only large room in the house. A round-about fire-place occupied one end of the chamber, sheltered from the draught of the door by a dark oak screen, with a bench on the warm side of it, and here, or in the deep ingle nooks, on winter nights, the neighbours would sit and chat by the blazing hearth, discussing pots of "nappy ale, good and stale," as the old ballad hath it; and as persons of both sexes came thither, young as well as old, many a match was struck up by Bess's cheery fire-side. From the blackened rafters hung a goodly supply of hams, sides of bacon, and dried tongues, with a profusion of oat-cakes in a bread-flake,

while in case this store should be exhausted, means of replenishment were at hand in the huge, full-crammed meal-chest standing in one corner. Altogether, there was a look of abundance as well as of comfort about the place.

Great was Bess's consternation, when the poor pedlar, who had quitted her house little more than an hour ago, full of health and spirits, was brought back to it in such a deplorable condition; and when she saw him deposited at her door, notwithstanding her masculine character, she had some difficulty in repressing a scream. She did not, however, yield to the weakness, but seeing at once what was best to be done, caused him to be transported by the grooms to the chamber he had occupied over-night, and laid upon the bed. Medical assistance was fortunately at hand; for it chanced that Master Sudall, the chirurgeon of Colne, was in the house at the time, having been brought to Goldshaw, by the great sickness that prevailed at Sabden and elsewhere in the neighbourhood. Sudall was immediately in attendance upon the sufferer, and bld him copiously, after which the poor man seemed much easier; and Richard Assheton, taking the chirurgeon aside, asked his opinion of the case, and was told by Sudall that he did not think the pedlar's life in danger, but he doubted whether he would ever recover the use of his limbs.

"You do not attribute the attack to witchcraft, I suppose, Master Sudall?" said Richard.

"I do not like to deliver an opinion, Sir," replied the chirurgeon. "It is impossible to decide when all the appearances are precisely like those of an ordinary attack of paralysis. But a sad case has recently come under my observation, as to which I can have no doubt — I mean as to its being the result of witchcraft — but I will tell you more about it presently, for I must now return to my patient."

It being agreed among the party to rest for an hour at the little hostel, and partake of some refreshment, Nicholas went to look after the horses, while Roger Nowell and Richard remained in the room with the pedlar. Bess Whitaker owned an extensive farm-yard, provided with cowhouses, stables, and a large barn; and it was to the latter place that the two grooms proposed to repair with Sparshot and play a game at loggats on the clay floor. No one knew what had become of the reeve, for on depositing the poor pedlar at the door of the hostel, he had mounted his horse and ridden away. Having ordered some fried eggs and bacon, Nicholas wended his way to the stable, while Bess, assisted by a stout kitchen wench, busied herself in preparing the eatables, and it was at this juncture that Master Potts entered the house.

Bess eyed him narrowly, and was by no means prepossessed by his looks, while the muddy condition of his habiliments did not tend to exalt him in her opinion.

"Yo mey yersel a' whoam, mon, ey mun say," she observed, as the attorney seated himself on the bench beside her.

"To be sure," rejoined Potts, "where should a man make himself at home if not at an inn. Those eggs and bacon look very tempting. I 'll try some presently; and as soon as you 've done with the frying-pan, I 'll have a pottle of sack."

"Neaw, yo winna," replied Bess. "Yo'n get nother eggs nor bacon nor sack here ey can promise ye. Ele an whoat kekes mun sarve your turn. Go to t' barn wi' t' other grooms, and play at kittle-pins or nine holes wi' hin, an ey'n send ye some ele."

"I 'm quite comfortable where I am, thank you, hostess," replied Potts, "and have no desire to play at kittle-pins or nine holes. But what does this bottle contain?"

"Sherris," replied Bess.

"Sherris!" echoed Potts, "and yet you say I can have no sack. Get me some sugar and eggs, and I 'll show you how to brew the drink. I was taught the art by my friend Ben Jonson — rare Ben — ha, ha!"

"Set the bottle down," cried Bess, angrily.

"What do you mean, woman?" said Potts, staring at her in surprise. "I told you to fetch sugar and eggs, and I now repeat the order, — sugar and half-a-dozen eggs at least."

"An ey repeat my order to yo," cried Bess, "to set the bottle down or ey'st may ye."

"Make me! ha, ha! I like that," cried Potts, "Let me tell you, woman, I am not accustomed to be ordered in this way. I shall do no such thing. If you will not bring the eggs I shall drink the wine, neat and unsophisticate." And he filled a flagon near him.

"If yo dun, yo shan pay dearly for it," said Bess, putting aside the frying-pan and taking down the horsewhip.

"I dare say I shall," replied Potts, merrily; "you hostesses generally do make one pay dearly. Very good sherris this, i' faith! — the true nutty flavour. Now do go and fetch me some eggs, my good woman. You must have plenty, with all the poultry I saw in the farm-yard; and then I'll teach you the whole art and mystery of brewing sack."

"Ey'n teach yo to dispute my orders," cried Bess. And, catching the attorney by the collar, she began to belabour him soundly with the whip.

"Holloa! ho! what 's the meaning of this?" cried Potts, struggling to get free. "Assault and battery; ho!"

"Ey'n sawt an batter yo, ay an baste yo too!" replied Bess, continuing to lay on the whip.

"Why, zounds! this passes a joke," cried the attorney. "How desperately strong she is! I shall be murdered! Help! Help! The woman must be a witch."

"A witch! Ey'n teach yo' to ca' me feaw names," cried the enraged hostess, laying on with greater fury.

"Help! help!" roared Potts.

At this moment Nicholas returned from the stables, and seeing how matters stood, flew to the attorney's assistance.

"Come, come, Bess," he cried, laying hold of her arm, "you 've given him enough. What has Master Potts been about? Not insulting you, I hope."

"Neaw, ey'd tak keare he didna do that, squoire," replied the hostess. "Ey towd him he'd get nowt boh ele here, an' he made free wi't wine bottle, so ey brought down t' whip jist to teach him manners."

"You teach me, you ignorant and insolent hussey," cried Potts, furiously; "do you think ey'm to be taught manners by an overgrown Lancashire witch like you? I 'll teach you what it is to assault a gentleman. I 'll prefer an instant complaint against you to my singular good friend and client, Master Roger, who is in your house, and you 'll soon find whom you 've got to deal with —"

"Marry — kem — eawt!" exclaimed Bess, "who con it be? Ey took yo fo' one o't grooms, mon."

"Fire and fury," exclaimed Potts, "this is intolerable. Master Nowell shall let you know who I am, woman."

"Nay, I 'll tell you, Bess," interposed Nicholas, laughing. "This little gentleman is a London lawyer, who is going to Rough Lee on business with Master Roger Nowell. Unluckily, he got pitched into a quagmire in Read Park, and that is the reason why his countenance and habiliments have got begrimed."

"Eigh! ey thowt he wur i' a strawnge fettle," replied Bess; "an so he be a lawyer fro' Lunnon, eh? Weel," she added, laughing, and displaying two ranges of very white teeth,

"he 'll remember Bess Whitaker, t' next time he comes to Pendle Forest."

"And she 'll remember me," rejoined Potts.

"Neaw more sawce, mon," cried Bess, "or ey'n raddle thy boans again."

"No you won't, woman," cried Potts, snatching up his horsewhip, which he had dropped in the previous scuffle, and brandishing it fiercely. "I dare you to touch me."

Nicholas was obliged once more to interfere, and as he passed his arms round the hostess's waist, he thought a kiss might tend to bring matters to a peaceable issue, so he took one.

"Ha' done wi' ye, squoire," cried Bess, who, however, did not look very seriously offended by the liberty.

"By my faith, your lips are so sweet that I must have another," cried Nicholas, "I tell you what, Bess, you 're the finest woman in Lancashire, and you owe it to the county to get married."

"Whoy so?" said Bess.

"Because it would be a pity to lose the breed," replied Nicholas. "What say you to Master Potts there? Will he suit you?"

"He — pooh! Do yo think ey'd put up wi' sich powsement os he! Neaw, when Bess Whitaker, the lonleydey o' Goldshey, weds, it shan be to a mon, and nah to a ninny hommer."

"Bravely resolved, Bess," cried Nicholas. "You deserve another kiss for your spirit."

"Ha' done, ey say," cried Bess, dealing him a gentle tap that sounded very much like a buffet. "See how yon jobberknow is grinnin' at ye."

"Jobberknow and ninny hammer," cried Potts, furiously; "really, woman, I cannot permit such names to be applied to me."

"Os yo please, boh ey'st gi' ye nah better," rejoined the hostess.

"Come, Bess, a truce to this," observed Nicholas, "the eggs and bacon are spoiling, and I 'm dying with hunger. There — there," he added, clapping her on the shoulder, "set the dish before us, that 's a good soul — a couple of plates, some oat-cakes and butter, and we shall do."

And while Bess attended to these requirements, he observed, "This sudden seizure of poor John Law is a bad business."

"'Deed on it is, squoire," replied Bess, "ey wur quite glopp'nt at seet on him. Lorjus o' me! whoy, it 's scarcely an hour sin he left here, lookin' os strong an os 'earty os yersel. Boh it 's a kazzardly onsartin loife we lead. Here to-day an gone the morrow, as Parson Houlden says. Wall-a-day!"

"True, true, Bess," replied the squire, "and the best plan, therefore is, to make the most of the passing moment. So brew us each a lusty pottle of sack, and fry us some more eggs and bacon."

And while the hostess proceeded to prepare the sack, Potts remarked to Nicholas, "I have got another case of witchcraft, squire. Mary Baldwyn, the miller's daughter, of Rough Lee."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Nicholas. "What, is the poor girl bewitched?"

"Bewitched to death — that 's all," said Potts.

"Eigh — poor Meary! hoo 's to be berried here this mornin," observed Bess, emptying the bottle of sherris into a pot, and placing the latter on the fire.

"And you think she was forespoken?" said Nicholas, addressing her.

"Folk sayn so," replied Bess; "boh I 'd leyther howd my tung about it."

"Then I suppose you pay tribute to Mother Chattox, hostess?" cried Potts,—"butter, eggs, and milk from the farm, ale and wine from the cellar, with a flitch of bacon now and then, ey?"

"Nay, by th' maskins! ey gi' her nowt," cried Bess.

"Then you bribe Mother Demdike, and that comes to the same thing," said Potts.

"Weel, yo're neaw so fur fro' t' mark this time," replied Bess, adding eggs, sugar, and spice to the now boiling wine, and stirring up the compound.

"I wonder where your brother, the reeve of the forest, can be, Master Potts," observed Nicholas. "I did not see either him or his horse at the stables."

"Perhaps the arch impostor has taken himself off altogether," said Potts; "and if so, I shall be sorry, for I have not done with him."

The sack was now set before them, and pronounced excellent, and while they were engaged in discussing it, together with a fresh supply of eggs and bacon, fried by the kitchen wench, Roger Nowell came out of the inner room, accompanied by Richard and the chirurgeon.

"Well, Master Sudall, how goes on your patient?" inquired Nicholas of the latter.

"Much more favourably than I expected, squire," replied the chirurgeon. "He will be better left alone for awhile, and as I shall not quit the village till evening, I shall be able to look well after him."

"You think the attack occasioned by witchcraft, of course, Sir?" said Potts.

"The poor fellow affirms it to be so, but I can give no opinion," replied Sudall, evasively.

"You must make up your mind as to the matter, for I think it right to tell you your evidence will be required," said Potts.

"Perhaps, you may have seen poor Mary Baldwyn, the miller's daughter, of Rough Lee, and can speak more positively as to her case."

"I can, Sir," replied the chirurgeon, seating himself beside Potts, while Roger Nowell and Richard placed themselves on the opposite side of the table. "This is the case I referred to a short time ago, when answering your inquiries on the same subject, Master Richard, and a most afflicting one it is. But you shall have the particulars. Six months ago, Mary Baldwyn was as lovely and blooming a lass as could be seen, the joy of her widowed father's heart. A hot-headed, obstinate man is Richard Baldwyn, and he was unwise enough to incur the displeasure of Mother Demdike, by favouring her rival, old Chattox, to whom he gave flour and meal, while he refused the same tribute to the other. The first time Mother Demdike was dismissed without the customary dole, one of his mill-stones broke, and, instead of taking this as a warning, he became more obstinate. She came a second time, and he sent her away with curses. Then all his flour grew damp and musty, and no one would buy it. Still he remained obstinate, and when she appeared again, he would have laid hands upon her. But she raised her staff, and the blows fell short. 'I have given thee two warnings, Richard,' she said, 'and thou hast paid no heed to them. Now I will make thee smart, lad, in right earnest. That which thou lovest best thou shalt lose.' Upon this bethinking him that the dearest thing he had in the world was his daughter Mary, and afraid of harm happening to her, Richard would fain have made up his quarrel with the old witch, but it had now gone too far, and she would not listen to him, but uttering some words with which the name of the girl was mingled, shook her staff at the house and departed. The next day poor Mary was taken ill, and her father, in despair, applied to old Chattox, who promised him help,

and did her best, I make no doubt, for she would have willingly thwarted her rival, and robbed her of her prey, but the latter was too strong for her, and the hapless victim got daily worse and worse. Her blooming cheek grew white and hollow, her dark eyes glistened with unnatural lustre, and she was seen no more on the banks of Pendle Water. Before this, my aid had been called in by the afflicted father — and I did all I could — but I knew she would die — and I told him so. The information I feared had killed him, for he fell down like a stone — and I repented having spoken. However he recovered, and made a last appeal to Mother Demdike, but the unrelenting hag derided him and cursed him, telling him if he brought her all his mill contained, and added to that all his substance, she would not spare his child. He returned heart-broken, and never quitted the poor girl's bedside till she breathed her last."

"Poor Ruchot! Robb'd o' his ownly dowter — an neaw woife to cheer him! Ey pity him fro' t' bottom o' my heart," said Bess, whose tears had flowed freely during the narration.

"He is well nigh crazed with grief," said the chirurgeon. "I hope he will commit no rash act."

Expressions of deep commiseration for the untimely death of the miller's daughter had been uttered by all the party, and they were talking over the strange circumstances attending it, when they were roused by the trampling of horses' feet at the door, and the moment after, a middle-aged man, clad in deep mourning, but put on in a manner that betrayed the disorder of his mind, entered the house. His looks were wild and frenzied, his cheeks haggard, and he rushed into the room so abruptly that he did not at first observe the company assembled.

"Why, Richard Baldwyn, is that you?" cried the chirurgeon.

"What! is this the father?" exclaimed Potts, taking out his memorandum-book; "I must prepare to interrogate him."

"Sit thee down, Ruchot, — sit thee down, mon," said Bess, taking his hand kindly, and leading him to a bench. "Con ey get thee onny thing?"

"Neaw — neaw, Bess," replied the miller, "ey ha lost aw ey vallied i' this warlt, an ey care na how soon ey quit it mysel."

"Neigh, dunna talk on thus, Ruchot," said Bess, in accents of sincere sympathy. "Theaw win live to see happier an brighter days."

"Ey win live to be revenged, Bess," cried the miller, rising suddenly, and stamping his foot on the ground, — "that accursed witch has robbed me o' my 'eart's chief treasure, — hoo has crushed a poor innocent os never injured her i' thowt or deed — an has struck the heaviest blow that could be dealt me; but by the heaven above us ey win requite her! A feayther's deep an lasting curse leet on her guilty heoad, an on those of aw her cursed race. Nah rest, neet nor day, win ey know, till ey ha brought em to the stake."

"Right — right — my good friend — an excellent resolution — bring them to the stake," cried Potts.

But his enthusiasm was suddenly checked by observing the reeve of the forest peeping from behind the wainscot, and earnestly regarding the miller, and he called the attention of the latter to him.

Richard Baldwyn mechanically followed the expressive gestures of the attorney, — but he saw no one, for the reeve had disappeared.

The incident passed unnoticed by the others, who had been too deeply moved by poor Baldwyn's outburst of grief to pay attention to it.

After a little while Bess Whitaker succeeded in prevailing upon the miller to sit down, and when he became more composed he told her that the funeral procession, consisting of some of his neighbours who had undertaken to attend his ill-fated daughter to her last home, was coming from Rough Lee to Goldshaw, but that unable to bear them company, he had ridden on by himself. It appeared, also, from his muttered threats, that he had meditated some wild project of vengeance against Mother Demdike, which he intended to put into execution before the day was over; but Master Potts endeavoured to dissuade him from this course, assuring him that the most certain and efficacious mode of revenge he could adopt would be through the medium of the law, and that he would give him his best advice and assistance in the matter. While they were talking thus, the bell began to toll, and every stroke seemed to vibrate through the heart of the afflicted father, who was at last so overpowered by grief, that the hostess deemed it expedient to lead him into an inner room where he might indulge his sorrow unobserved.

Without awaiting the issue of this painful scene, Richard, who was much affected by it, went forth, and taking his horse from the stable, with the intention of riding on slowly before the others, led the animal towards the church-yard. When within a short distance of the gray old fabric he paused. The bell continued to toll mournfully, and deepened the melancholy hue of his thoughts. The sad tale he had heard held possession of his mind, and while he pitied poor Mary Baldwyn, he began to entertain apprehensions that Alizon might meet a similar fate. So many strange circumstances had taken place during the morning's ride; he had listened to so many dismal relations that, coupled with the dark and mysterious events of the previous night, he was quite bewildered, and felt oppressed as if by a hideous nightmare, which it was

impossible to shake off. He thought of Mothers Demdike and Chattox. Could these dread beings be permitted to exercise baneful influence over mankind? With all the apparent proofs of their power he had received, he still strove to doubt, and to persuade himself that the various cases of witchcraft described to him were only held to be such by the timid and the credulous.

Full of these meditations, he tied his horse to a tree and entered the church-yard, and while pursuing a path shaded by a row of young lime trees leading to the porch, he perceived at a little distance from him, near the cross erected by Abbot Cliderhow, two persons who attracted his attention. One was the sexton, who was now deep in the grave; and the other an old woman, with her back towards him. Neither had remarked his approach, and influenced by an unaccountable feeling of curiosity, he stood still to watch their proceedings. Presently, the sexton, who was shovelling out the mould, paused in his task; and the old woman, in a hoarse voice, which seemed familiar to the listener, said, "What hast found, Zachariah?"

"That which yo lack, mother," replied the sexton, "a mazzard wi' aw th' teeth in't."

"Pluck out eight, and give them me," replied the hag.

And, as the sexton complied with her injunction, she added, "Now I must have three scalps."

"Here they be, mother," replied Zachariah, uncovering a heap of mould with his spade. "Two brain-pans bleached loike snow, an the third wi' more hewr on it than ey ha' o' my own sconce. Fro' its size an shape ey should tak it to be a female. Ey ha' laid these three sculls aside fo' ye. Whot dun yo mean to do wi' 'em?"

"Question me not, Zachariah," said the hag, sternly; "now give me some pieces of the mouldering coffin, and fill this box with the dust of the corpse it contained."

The sexton complied with her request.

"Now yo ha' getten aw yo seek, mother," he said, "ey wad pray you to tay your departure, fo' the berrin folk win be here presently."

"I 'm going," replied the hag; "but first I must have my funeral rites performed — ha! ha! Bury this for me, Zachariah," she said, giving him a small clay figure. "Bury it deep, and as it moulders away, may she it represents pine and wither, till she come to the grave likewise!"

"An whoam doth it represent, mother?" asked the sexton, regarding the image with curiosity. "Ey dunna knoa the feace?"

"How should you know it, fool, since you have never seen her in whose likeness it is made," replied the hag. "She is connected with the race I hate."

"Wi' the Demdikes?" inquired the sexton.

"Ay," replied the hag, "with the Demdikes. She passes for one of them — but she is not of them. Nevertheless, I hate her as though she were."

"Yo dunna mean Alizon Device?" said the sexton. "Ey ha' heerd say hoo be varry comely an kind-hearted, an ey should be sorry onny harm befel her."

"Mary Baldwyn, who will soon lie there, was quite as comely and kind-hearted as Alizon," cried the hag, "and yet Mother Demdike had no pity on her."

"An that 's true," replied the sexton. "Weel, weel; ey'n do your bidding."

"Hold!" exclaimed Richard, stepping forward. "I will not suffer this abomination to be practised."

"Who is it speaks to me?" cried the hag, turning round, and disclosing the hideous countenance of Mother Chattox. "The voice is that of Richard Assheton."

"It is Richard Assheton who speaks," cried the young man, "and I command you to desist from this wickedness. Give me that clay image," he cried, snatching it from the sexton, and trampling it to dust beneath his feet. "Thus I destroy thy impious handiwork, and defeat thy evil intentions."

"Ah! think'st thou so, lad," rejoined Mother Chattox. "Thou wilt find thyself mistaken. My curse has already alighted upon thee, and it shall work. Thou lov'st Alizon. — I know it. But she shall never be thine. Now, go thy ways."

"I will go," replied Richard — "but you shall come with me, old woman."

"Dare you lay hands on me?" screamed the hag.

"Nay let her be, mester," interposed the sexton, "yo had better."

"You are as bad as she is," said Richard, "and deserve equal punishment. You escaped yesterday at Whalley, old woman, but you shall not escape me now."

"Be not too sure of that," cried the hag, disabling him for the moment, by a severe blow on the arm from her staff. And shuffling off with an agility which could scarcely have been expected from her, she passed through a gate near her, and disappeared behind the high wall.

Richard would have followed, but he was detained by the sexton, who besought him, as he valued his life, not to interfere, and when at last he broke away from the old man, he could see nothing of her, and only heard the sound of horses'

feet in the distance. Either his eyes deceived him, or at a turn in the woody lane skirting the church he descried the reeve of the forest galloping off with the old woman behind him. This lane led towards Rough Lee, and without a moment's hesitation, Richard flew to the spot where he had left his horse, and mounting him, rode swiftly along it.

END OF VOL. I.

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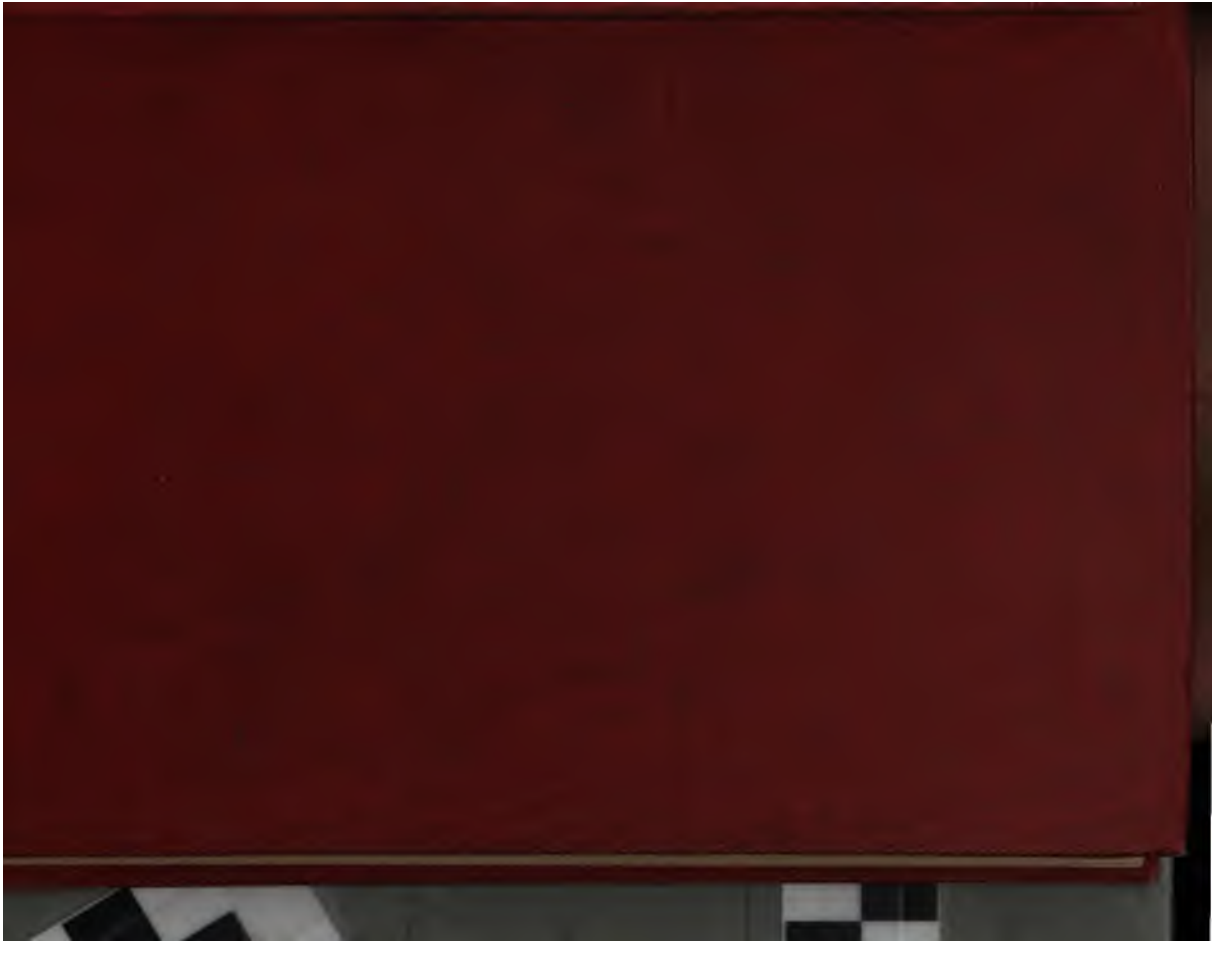
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